

RUSSIAN SNAP MILITARY EXERCISE IN MARCH OF 2015;  
WHAT IMPLICATIONS DID THIS EXERCISE HAVE?

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General Studies

by

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)



## ABSTRACT

RUSSIAN SNAP MILITARY EXERCISE IN MARCH OF 2015; WHAT IMPLICATIONS DID THIS EXERCISE HAVE?, by Major Espen Stiberg, 112 pages.

This study examines the Norwegian national military exercise Joint Viking 2015 and a Russian snap exercise that took place in the midst of it. This study examines possible explanations for why Russia responded with this snap exercise, and the possible implications for the Russian response.

The study explores the growing importance of the High North and the Arctic region especially regarding Russian strategic military development and as a future base for economic wealth. It underlines the developments in the relationships between Russia, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and NATO during the last decade and after the Ukrainian crisis in 2014. This relationship is arguably at its coldest since the end of the Cold War. The study examines Russia's military reform and modernization process since 2010 and the use of military exercises to test and validate the results of it.

The study concludes that Russia conducted this snap exercise to test its military apparatus and to demonstrate to NATO and the US in particular, that their reform and modernizations processes have produced results. Further, it demonstrates to any observer that Russia can mobilize rapidly the nation for war, shift substantial forces in its interior to meet any threat, and that Russia is willing to use military force against any threat to the nation.



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Before and just after arriving at the Command and General Staff College, I was told about the voluntary MMAS program. It was described as challenging and a lot of hard work on top of the regular curriculum; participation was far from unanimously recommended, primarily because of the workload. I arrived Ft. Leavenworth with a pretty firm decision to apply for the program, but questioned my intention several times before I applied. However, after introductory briefings by Dr. Prisco R. Hernandez at the beginning of the school year, I thought that the program was interesting and worth doing. Consequently, and after some consultancy with colleagues here and in Norway, I decided to sign up.

The experience has indeed been rewarding and worthwhile. Although, it has been challenging, the program has given me a rare opportunity to examine a subject of interest in depth. Additionally, the longer lasting benefit of engaging in research and writing this thesis is at least as valuable.

My thanks go to LTC Christopher Johnson, my committee chair and my Small Group Adviser, who provided outstanding guidance and motivation throughout the process. This thesis would not have been possible without the support from Dr. Lester W. Grau, Mr. Mark R. Wilcox and Mr. John R. Pilloni. Thank you for all your patience, advice, suggestions and continuous support throughout the process of research and writing.



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## ACRONYMS

FOI	Swedish Defence Research Institute
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GVP	Russian State Armament Program
JSCN	Joint Strategic Command North
MD	Military District
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NORDEFECO	Nordic Defence Cooperation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

Military exercises serve an important and regular function for any state with armed forces that has potential military adversaries. Russia is no exception. To understand recent high-profile Russian military exercises, it is crucial to understand what military exercises are for. When states devote resources to equipping and training a military, it is not necessarily because they are planning to attack another state or because they fear imminent invasion. International events that would require military action are almost always events that run a very low probability of occurrence. Yet, while they are events of low-probability, their nature presupposes high-risk; during such international emergencies, the consequences of failure are great. If a military needs to be used, it had better perform well.<sup>1</sup>

— Nathan Pinkoski, *How Alarming are Russian Military Exercises?*

In March 2105, Norwegian Defense Forces conducted a joint national exercise under the name of “Joint Viking 15.”<sup>2</sup> The exercise was conducted in the northernmost county of the country, Finnmark. This exercise marked a pronounced shift since Norway had not conducted military exercises of this scale in this part of the country since 1967.<sup>3</sup> Norwegian authorities announced this exercise to the Russian authorities through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in accordance with the

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<sup>1</sup> Nathan Pinkoski, “How Alarming Are Russian Military Exercises?” New East Platform, April 18, 2015, accessed September 9, 2016, <https://neweastplatform.org/2015/04/18/how-alarming-are-russian-military-exercises/>.

<sup>2</sup> Forsvaret, “Øvelse Joint Viking,” January 9, 2015, accessed October 1, 2016, <https://forsvaret.no/aktuelt/hva-skjer/øvelse-joint-viking>.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Nilsen, “Norway Launches High North Military Exercise,” Barentsobserver, March 16, 2015, accessed March 20, 2017, <http://barentsobserver.com/en/security/2015/03/northern-fleet-put-full-combat-alert-exercise-16-03>.



“Vienna Document” that regulates details regarding the mutual announcement of certain military activities.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, Norway opened this exercise for allied and Russian inspectors. While some NATO countries sent observers, Russia did not respond to this invitation.<sup>5</sup>

In the midst of this exercise, the Russians initiated what they called a surprise military inspection<sup>6</sup> (snap), mobilizing the entire Northern Fleet, the Joint Strategic Command North (JSCN) and moving forces into the region opposite Finnmark, thus expanding their response into a nationwide inspection/exercise as the Norwegian exercise progressed. This snap exercise generated substantial turmoil. It was widely discussed in the news media in Norway and elsewhere in Scandinavia as well as in Russian and international media.

As the chapter’s epigraph indicates, military exercises play a vital role for the military forces of any state that has potential military adversaries. This reality holds true for both Norway and Russia, and both conduct exercises. What differed, in this case, was that Norway conducted an exercise in Finnmark that was larger and closer to the Russian border than in decades’ past.

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<sup>4</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), “Vienna Document 2011, on Confidence-and Security- Building Measures,” November 30, 2011, accessed September 10, 2016, <https://www.osce.org/fsc/86597?download=true>.

<sup>5</sup> Trude Pettersen, “5000 Soldiers Take Part in Exercise in Finnmark,” Barentsobserver, December 5, 2014, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://barentsobserver.com/en/security/2014/12/5000-soldiers-take-part-exercise-finnmark-05-12>.

<sup>6</sup> Johan Norberg, *Training to Fight–Russia’s Major Military Exercises 2011-2014* (Stockholm: FOI, 2015), 24.





Figure 1. Map to Illustrate the Finnmark County's Proximity to Russia and Murmansk

Source: Avagabonde, "Norway—Arriving in Kirkenes," January 1, 1970, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://avagabonde.blogspot.com/2010/08/norway-arriving-in-kirkenes.html>.

The response from Russia demonstrated a notable change in their exercise pattern from the previous years. Not only was this a surprise inspection aimed at testing combat readiness levels, it was also not announced in accordance with the Vienna Document, according to Russian statements.<sup>7</sup> However, it is vital to note that, "military activities carried out without advance notice to the troops involved are excepted to the requirement for prior notification."<sup>8</sup> The exercise grew into a nationwide drill as it progressed and

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<sup>7</sup> Pavel Felgenhauer, "Putin Mobilizes Forces Preparing to Fight with NATO and US," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 12, no. 51 (March 19, 2015), accessed March 18, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/putin-mobilizes-forces-preparing-to-fight-with-nato-and-us/>.

<sup>8</sup> The Vienna Document Chapter V states; Prior Notification of Certain Military Activities (CMA): at least 42 days' advance notice for CMA exceeding one of the



involved all of Russia's Military Districts. Further, it encompassed a geographical area outside of the usual pattern of other snap exercises previously conducted by Russia, stretching from Norway to the Baltics through Poland and into Crimea.<sup>9</sup>

The Norwegian exercise started on 1 March and ended on 20 March, but the simulated combat phase lasted from 9 March to 18 March. It was substantial in terms of the country's military capabilities. Around 5000 personnel participated, using the bulk of the Army's heavy equipment, Airforce aircraft, and Navy surface and sub-surface vessels. In addition, the Homeguard and Special Forces also participated. Prior to the Joint Viking 15 kickoff, Norwegian army spokesman Vegar Gystad said, "If we're to have a credible defense that can defend the entire country, we also have to train in the entire country."<sup>10</sup> It was a joint exercise including all services of the Norwegian Defence Forces, and the purpose was to train for the build-up and deployment of a joint combat force to gain valuable experience in conducting joint operations on Norwegian territory.<sup>11</sup>

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following thresholds: 9,000 troops, 250 tanks, 500 ACVs, or 250 pieces of artillery. The Vienna Document Plus Decision No. 9/12 on Prior Notification of Major Military Activities, also calls upon participating states to provide notification of one major military exercise or military activity in a calendar year, if they do not conduct activities that meets the aforementioned thresholds. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), "Forum for Security Co-operation Decision No. 9/12," October 17, 2012, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.osce.org/fsc/96492>.

<sup>9</sup> Stratfor, "Russia Targets NATO with Military Exercises," March 19, 2015, accessed February 14, 2017, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/russia-targets-nato-military-exercises>.

<sup>10</sup> Presstv.ir announcement regarding exercise Joint Viking 2015, accessed January 22, 2017, <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/03/09/401001/Norway-holds-drills-near-Russia-border>.

<sup>11</sup> Norwegian Defence official website, <http://www.forsvaret.no> (statement translated by author).



According to a statement given by Lieutenant General Morten Haga Lunde, the Norwegian exercise had been planned before the Ukrainian crisis and was not a response to it. Further, he expressed “that the current security situation in Europe shows that the exercise is more relevant than ever.”<sup>12</sup> This exercise was announced in advance to the Russians in compliance with the Vienna Document, so it did not come as a surprise to them. The Russians did, however, react politically and diplomatically, by making public accusations that Norway and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) were provoking and causing unnecessary instability in the High North.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Grove, “Russia Starts Nationwide Show of Force,” *Reuters*, March 16, 2015, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-military-exercises-idUSKBN0MC0JO20150316>.

<sup>13</sup> Anders Brekke and Vegard Tjørhom, “*Putin beordrer stor militærøvelse i nord*,” NRK, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://www.nrk.no/urix/putin-beordrer-stor-militaerovelse-i-nord-1.12262088>.



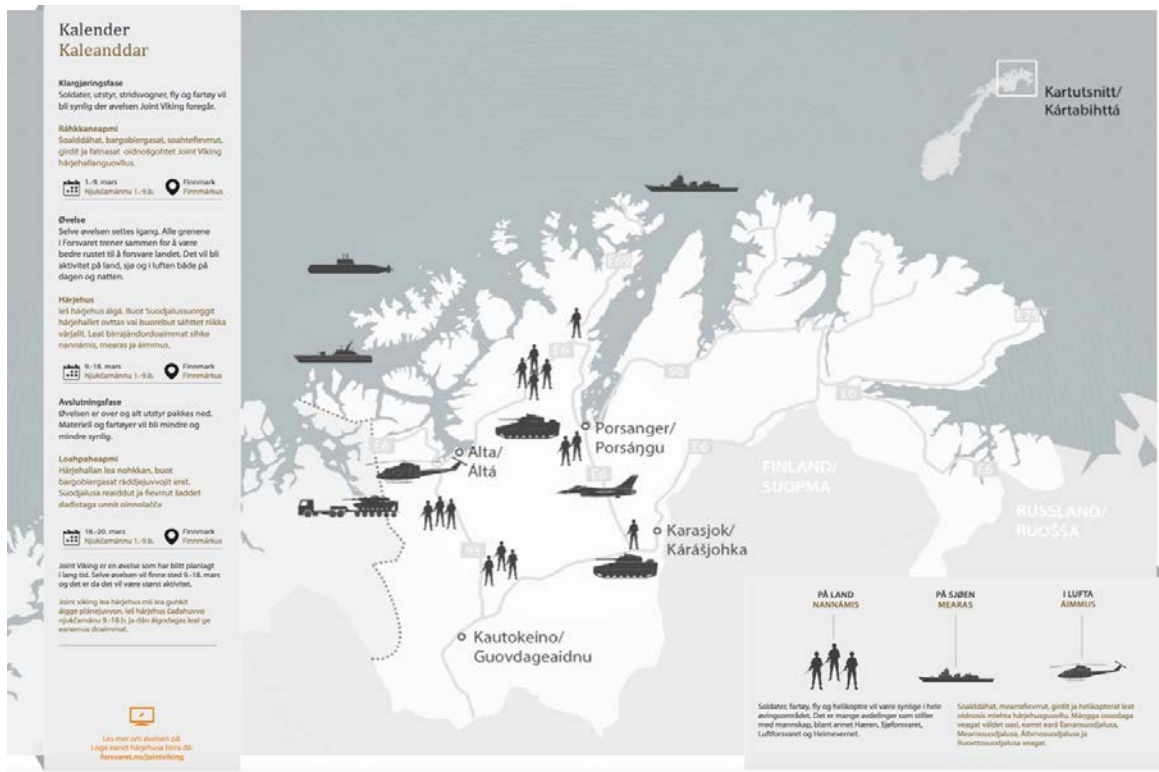


Figure 2. Norway's Joint Viking 15 Exercise Map, 1-20 March 2015

Source: Forsvaret, "Joint Viking 2015," accessed January 22, 2017, <http://www.forsvaret.no>. Joint Viking 2015 Public Information Folder issued by the Norwegian Defence, illustrates the central exercise area in Finnmark with a depiction of the Norwegian capabilities.

The Russian snap exercise started on 16 March, and ended on 21 March, and while it began in the High North centered on the Northern Fleet, it soon grew to encompass the entire Russian Federation and all of its military districts (see figure 3). Ultimately, this Russian exercise involved around 80,000 personnel, 12,000 pieces of heavy equipment, 65 warships, 15 submarines, and 220 aircraft.<sup>14</sup> The Russian exercise

<sup>14</sup> European Leadership Network, "Anatomy of a Russian Exercise," August 12, 2015, accessed October 1, 2016, [http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/anatomy-of-a-russian-exercise\\_2914.html](http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/anatomy-of-a-russian-exercise_2914.html).



outnumbered Norway's exercise and according to some sources the response was aimed at demonstrating the military superiority of Russia. "Vladimir Putin orders Russia's entire Northern Fleet to mobilize in huge military exercises. The Navy's Northern Fleet stands in full combat readiness in Russia's Arctic north, apparently aimed at dwarfing military drills in neighboring Norway, a NATO member"<sup>15</sup> (see figure 9 for comparison).

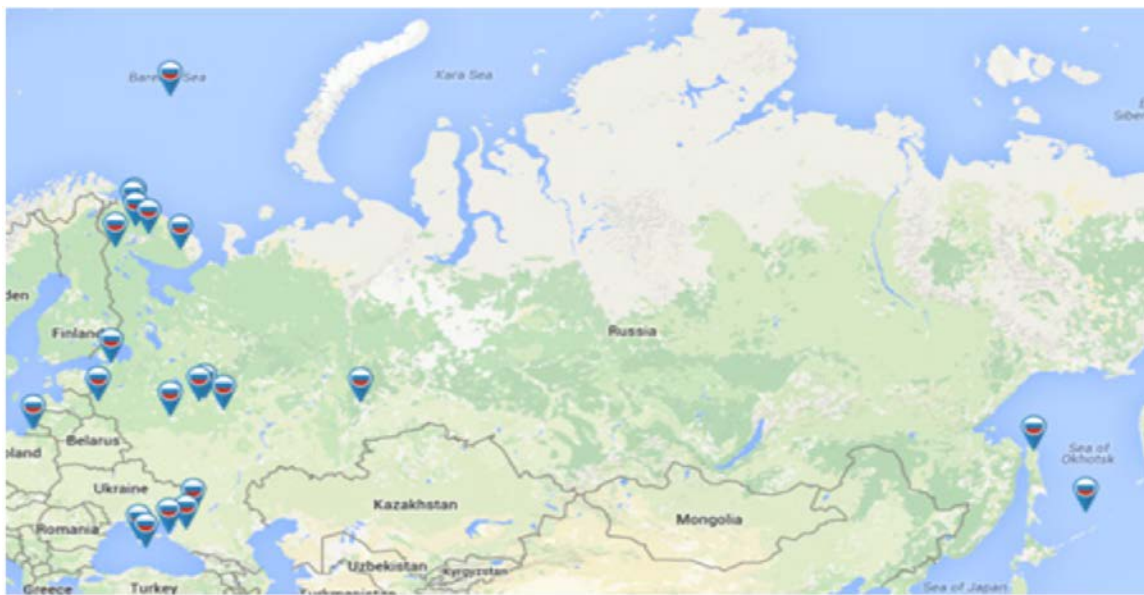


Figure 3. Russian Exercise Map, 16-21 March 2015–Locations

*Source:* Thomas Frear, "Anatomy of a Russian Exercise," European Leadership Network, August 12, 2015, accessed October 1, 2016, <http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/medialibrary/2015/08/07/ea2b8c22/Preparing%20for%20the%20Worst.pdf>.

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<sup>15</sup> Lizzie Dearden describes and compares the two nations exercise and elaborate on aspects of Russian military assertiveness in this article. Lizzie Dearden, "Vladimir Putin Orders Russia's Entire Northern Fleet to Mobilise in Huge Military Exercises," *Independent*, March 16, 2015, accessed September 8, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/vladimir-putin-orders-russias-entire-northern-fleet-to-mobilise-in-huge-military-exercises-10110874.html>.



The Russian snap exercise that forms the basis of this study will be discussed in detail in chapter 4 as part of the analysis attempting to determine its purpose, its scope, and its greater relevance to regional security.

### Purpose and Research Question

This study's purpose is to increase the understanding of and knowledge about this Russian snap exercise as well as its potential implications. The study will describe the Norwegian exercise Joint Viking 2015 and the Russian snap exercise in broad terms, painting a picture of the overall "scheme of maneuver" to determine what took place chronologically. This picture will establish a basis for understanding and assist in determining if the Russian exercise was a direct response to the Norwegian exercise or part of a broader Russian purpose and message. It will further expound on whether and how Russian military exercise patterns have changed since the Treaty on Maritime Delimitation in the Barents Sea between Norway and Russia that was signed on 15 September 2010. This investigation will shed light on the possible implications that these types of exercises have contributing to the following problem statement: What are the potential implications of this Russian snap military exercise?

Four secondary research questions support the primary question for this thesis. These questions are implied in the beginning of this paragraph, and they relate to the overall description given in the introduction:

1. What was exercise Joint Viking 2015?
2. What was the Russian snap exercise?
3. Was the Russian exercise a response to Joint Viking 2015?
4. What broader Russian interests were involved in the snap exercise?



### Definition of Key Terms

Arctic Coastal States. Referred to as the five coastal states that border the Arctic Ocean, Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, Russia, and USA.<sup>16</sup>

Arctic States. The eight members of the Arctic Council that compose the Arctic States: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States of America.<sup>17</sup>

GIUK Gap. The sea area between Greenland, Iceland, and The United Kingdom. Frequently referred to as the GIUK-Norway gap.<sup>18</sup>

Joint Strategic Command North (JSCN). The JSCN was formed on December 2014, based on the Northern Sea Fleet, and is responsible for coordinating the different military branches located in the Arctic. Air forces and Air defense forces from other military districts have been added to this command and ground forces brigades have been reinforced or stood up as part of the command. It is not an equivalent of the military

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<sup>16</sup> Arctic Governance Project, “The Five Coastal States: Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Norway, Russia and USA,” accessed March 18, 2017, <http://www.arcticgovernance.org/the-five-coastal-states-canada-denmarkgreenland-norway-russia-and-usa.4612672-137746.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Arctic Council, “Member States,” July 6, 2015, accessed March 18, 2017, <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us/member-states>.

<sup>18</sup> High North News, “Invisible Contest: The Submarine Cat-and-Mouse Game,” March 7, 2017, accessed March 18, 2017, <http://www.highnorthnews.com/invisible-contest-the-submarine-cat-and-mouse-game/>.



districts, nor does the JSCN perform all of the same functions as the districts, such as conscription and call up, but it is equal when it comes to war-fighting responsibilities.<sup>19</sup>

NATO. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Partnership for Peace. Partnership for Peace was established in 1994 to enable participants to develop an individual relationship with NATO, choosing their priorities for cooperation, and the level and pace of progress. Currently, there are 22 countries in the Partnership for Peace program, including Sweden, Finland, and Russia.<sup>20</sup>

Russian Military Districts. Russia has four military districts: The Eastern, the Southern, the Central, and the Western District. The Western, with headquarters in Moscow, controls all military personnel and hardware in the Western Military District. The district incorporates the former Moscow and Leningrad military districts and the Baltic and Northern Fleets. The Southern, with headquarters in Rostov, is in charge of the Southern Military District, which includes the former North Caucasian Military District and the Black Sea Fleet and Caspian Flotilla. The Central, with headquarters in Yekaterinburg, controls the Central Military District, including the former Volga-Urals Military District and the western part of the Siberian Military District. Finally, the

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<sup>19</sup> Global Security, “Arctic Strategic Command: Sever (North) Unified Strategic Command (USC),” accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/vo-northern.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> NATO, “Partnership for Peace Programme,” April 7, 2016, accessed March 17, 2017, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_50349.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50349.htm).



Eastern, with headquarters in Khabarovsk, has command of the Pacific Fleet, the Far Eastern Military District, and the larger part of the Siberian Military District.<sup>21</sup>



Figure 4. Russian Military Districts

Source: Stratfor, “Russia's Military Districts,” February 24, 2014, accessed February 14, 2017, <https://www.stratfor.com/image/russias-military-districts>.

The Bastion. In Norwegian military writings, the Bastion is the area that Russia’s strategic submarines patrol. It forms Russia’s main defense of their strategic nuclear forces in the High North.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Global Security, “Russian Military Districts,” accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/mo-md.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy–Unified Effort* (Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Defence, 2015), 21, accessed February 16, 2016, <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/fd/dokumenter/unified-effort>.



The Bastion Defence. The area where Russia will deploy forces to conduct sea-denial, stretching from the Arctic to the GIUK Gap to protect and preserve the Northern Fleet's second strike capability during conflict or heightened tensions.<sup>23</sup>

The High North. The High North is a broad concept both geographically and politically. In geographical terms, it covers the sea and land, including islands and archipelagos, stretching northwards from the southern boundary of Nordland county in Norway and eastwards from the Greenland Sea to the Barents Sea and the Pechora Sea. In political terms, it includes the administrative entities of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia that are part of the Barents Cooperation. However, with increasing international interactions, the High North is increasingly becoming synonymous with the Arctic. In this study, the term "the Arctic" and the High North will overlap and be used as the wider geographical and political area where all Arctic States have interests, but it will primarily refer to the Russian and Norwegian Arctic zones.

The Northern Fleet. The Northern Fleet is an operational-strategic formation of the Russian Navy with nuclear-powered missile and torpedo submarines, missile-carrying and antisubmarine aviation, missiles, aircraft-carrying and anti-submarine ships.

The Svalbard—Spitsbergen Treaty. The Svalbard Treaty or the Spitsbergen Treaty, recognizes the sovereignty of Norway over the Arctic Archipelago of Svalbard, at the time called Spitsbergen. The exercise of sovereignty is, however, subject to certain stipulations, and not all Norwegian law applies. The treaty regulates the demilitarization

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



of the archipelago. The signatories were given equal rights to engage in commercial activities (mainly coal mining) on the islands.

As of 2012, Norway and Russia are making use of this right. Uniquely, the archipelago is an entirely visa-free zone under the terms of the Svalbard Treaty. The treaty was signed on 9 February 1920 and submitted for registration in the League of Nations Treaty Series on 21 October 1920. There were 14 original High Contracting Parties, including: The United States, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain, and Ireland (including the British overseas dominions of Canada, Australia, India, South Africa, and New Zealand). Several additional nations signed within the next five years before the treaty came into force, including the Soviet Union in 1924 and Germany and China in 1925. Of the original signatories, Japan was the last to ratify the treaty on 2 August 1925. On 14 August 1925, the treaty came into force. As of 2016, there are 43 parties to the treaty.<sup>24</sup>

### Limitations

That Russia is conducting military exercises is not a new phenomenon, and that they are operating near the Norwegian border is also not new. However, the type and the scale of the snap exercises observed since 2013 are quite new and relatively unstudied in military academic science. This thesis will, therefore, have clear limitations. Firstly, the quality and quantity of authoritative works on the topic are limited; secondly, much of the research conducted to date exists within the intelligence communities and because of its

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<sup>24</sup> The Faculty of Law, “The Svalbard Treaty,” accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.jus.uio.no/english/services/library/treaties/01/1-11/svalbard-treaty.xml>.



security classification is not usable in this study. Written books addressing the topic of the Russian snap exercise in 2015 are not available, but there are written works from internationally renowned security journals, think tanks, and news agencies that provide insight on it. Another limitation is that most material is online and somewhat limited in scope. The narrow nature of the source materials and the desire to use only unclassified sources limits the overall outcome and value of the thesis. A further limitation in this work results from potentially biased information. Given that the author has utilized information from official sources such as the Norwegian and Russian governments, some of this data may be biased and therefore less reliable for academic research. To mitigate this circumstance, the author has researched wider and utilized other sources to ensure that the study has been done within acceptable parameters for these types of research projects. Personal biases are also a source of limitations and could reduce the validity of this paper.

### Delimitations

This Russia-wide snap exercise included all military services and branches, and may constitute a part of the message Moscow sent, which will be addressed in the literature review. The author researched in depth to explore and determine the potential implications and to ascertain if the project could answer the research questions in a holistic manner. However, the thesis will not attempt to go deeper since that is a task that exceeds the time and scope of this research project. The author has also imposed a delimitation on the timeframe in which this study is conducted. Using the Delimitation Treaty between Norway and Russia from 2010 as a starting point emerged as a logical starting point, since this marked an observable peak in the relationship between the two



countries. The endpoint was chosen at year's end in 2015, since it seems sufficient to draw reasonable conclusions. As this research progressed, the author realized that it is a major undertaking to analyze and describe all possible implications that this case study produced. The initial thought to include the implications concerning the non-NATO countries of Sweden and Finland to the same extent as the analysis of addressing Norway and NATO proved overly ambitious given the paper's time and scope and also due to the difficulty of finding source materials on how this explicit exercise affected these nations.

### Significance of the Study

The increased attention given to the Arctic and the High North as a region of growing importance in political, academic, and military circles over the last years is evident, not only among nations with already existing interests, such as Russia, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Canada, and the United States of America. However, there is also an increase in interest from other nations as well. The vast natural resources on the continental shelf, fisheries, and other marine resources, as well as new and more secure shipping lanes due to an ever-shrinking ice cap are among the reasons for this heightened interest around the globe. From a military standpoint, the region has always been important, and this emphasis has been renewed following the end of the Cold War. Russia's assertiveness as a major military power and her focus on the Northern Sea Route, the militarization of the Arctic, and modernization of their armed forces are indicators of their heightened focus in the region.

Norway has always been a major player in the High North and still seeks to maintain that role. However, other nations have interests as well, including NATO as the most important military alliance in existence today. The situation in Europe and the



relationship between Russia, neighboring states, and NATO are high on the international agenda, and the author strongly believes that the readers of this thesis will gain insight on this situation.

To the author's knowledge, exploring a contemporary and explicit Russian snap military exercise as a case study and determining the possible implications of it at the time and in the immediate aftermath have not been previously attempted. A critical view of this case study can both enlighten and elicit a deeper understanding of the topic, and give rise to many unanswered questions related to it. A critical view of major events can also elicit arguments that are often lost in the heat of the moment, and bringing such arguments forward in a staff college environment is vital. Field grade officer students must deal with real world events upon returning to line officer assignments and the author strongly believes an understanding of this and similar issues is important to most military professionals.

### Summary and Conclusions

Exercise Joint Viking 2015 was a Norwegian national exercise. Norway notified Russia in accordance with the Vienna Document of 2011. The Norwegian Government invited foreign inspectors to observe the exercise, including Russian inspectors, but Russia did not respond to this invitation. This chapter has provided the information needed to answer secondary research question number: What was exercise Joint Viking 2015?



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The Russian snap exercise is quite recent and to the author's knowledge, there are no books written on it. However, on the broader issue related to the High North and the Arctic, including major actors and security policies in the region, the body of literature is plentiful. Sources can be categorized by physical type to include books, academic journals, special studies, and newspaper articles. Alternatively, they can be cataloged by origin, as government, non-government, think tanks, private, and other. Irrespective of derivation, all sources must be treated critically and in accordance with the normal standards governing academic study and analysis. The following discussion is not all-inclusive but serves to illustrate the range of materials and perspectives assimilated into research for this thesis.

The most useful sources were often journals and commentaries that represented unofficial assessments of policies. Other sources were not as unbiased in their assessments of events, a factor that heightened the author's sense of caution and necessitated a more critical approach to maintain objectivity. Official sources were largely used to determine and confirm the author's observations.

Because of the subject's contemporary nature and that the situation is still unfolding, there was an ever-present danger that the literature could overtake the actual subject at hand. This factor necessitated a clear limitation about timeframe, and strict adhere to not being caught up in more recent journals, articles, and viewpoints from the popular press. Generally, the quality of authorship figured prominently in the selection of



sources with some modifications to ensure that the body of literature is somewhat balanced from both the Russian and the Western perspective and to incorporate material recommended by the research committee.

Another consideration emerging from the structure of this thesis is that sources can be categorized among those that address historical background and perspective. For example, logical categories included Russian, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, and NATO roles and interest in the High North; Russian military developments; Russian military exercises; the contemporary environment in the High North and the Baltic Sea region; and the current and projected future of the mentioned region. The following review will address the above-mentioned topics in the following categories: historical background and context, key works, and online academic journals, newspapers, and articles.

### Historical Background and Context

One book that has proven valuable to understanding the historical context and the importance of the High North and the Arctic from a Russian perspective is, *The Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation: Soviet Breakthrough and Pursuit in the Arctic, October 1944*<sup>25</sup> by James F. Gebhardt. It describes the Soviet attack on German forces during World War II in northern Russia, Norway, and Finland.

The largest battle in modern history fought north of the Arctic Circle, it started west of Murmansk on the Kola Peninsula and continued with the pursuit of the retreating *Wehrmacht* into Norwegian and Finnish territory. The book's relevance is that it provides

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<sup>25</sup> James F. Gebhardt, *The Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation: Soviet Breakthrough and Pursuit in the Arctic, October 1944* (Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, U.S Army Command and General Staff College, 1990).



a significant perspective in understanding how warfare in the Arctic was conducted from a Russian point of view. In addition, it is important to appreciate that this “battle forms the empirical base for Russia’s arctic warfare doctrine.”<sup>26</sup> The experience gained and the tactics used by Russia in this campaign are evident in the way Russian forces in the North are organized today, and how they operate in the Arctic. The all arms and inter-service organization with naval, amphibious, air, and special-forces can be traced back to this campaign from 1944. This book also highlights the military strategic importance that the greater Murmansk area and the Kola Peninsula have had, and still have for Russia.

The ground fought over in this battle is the same strategically important ground considered by NATO and Russian military planners today. Norway is NATO’s flank security here and guards the approaches to the GIUK Gap. The geography has not changed since the time of the Russian–German battle, although infrastructure such as roads, railroads, airports, and other improvements have developed substantially. However, there are still considerable challenges related to operating and conducting military operations in this region.

Logistical challenges were one of the biggest problems facing both the Russian and the German military in 1944, and even today, this hostile environment will pose serious logistical challenges for those who are operating there. The climate is, to a large extent, the same regardless of the changes that are publically debated and observed, and both weather and terrain played a significant role in this battle.<sup>27</sup> The Arctic is a

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<sup>26</sup> Gebhardt, xiii.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 4-5.



threatening environment to operate in, and as mentioned in an often referred to Norwegian military saying, “If soldiers and units can operate and survive in the Arctic, they can operate and survive everywhere.” Another reason for using this book is that it inherently puts the Norwegian–Russian relationship into context. “Russia freed Northern Norway and Finnmark from the German occupation forces in 1944-45,”<sup>28</sup> and while Norway joined NATO as one of the founding members in 1949 and subsequently was on the western side of the Iron Curtain, a special relationship has developed between Norway and Russia. One aspect exemplifying this relationship is that “Norway did not allow NATO forces to train in Finnmark.”<sup>29</sup> This relationship can be characterized as very good in terms of one being a NATO member and the other, arguably, being the most prominent threat to NATO. However, this relationship has worsened after the Ukrainian crisis; although, it is important to note that at this time, neither country sees the other as an acute military threat.

#### The New Russia—Self-Assertive and Ambitious

Through most of the reviewed literature, the common theme was that the Russia, observed from the year 2000, has demonstrated a clear ambition to become a major power once again. In, *Putin’s Wars—The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*,<sup>30</sup> Marcel H. Van Herpen states that “Russia assesses itself as having a historical responsibility to

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>30</sup> Marcel Van Herpen, *Putin’s Wars—The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).



rebuild the lost empire.”<sup>31</sup> The aggressive foreign policy that Russia has pursued since the invasion of Georgia in 2008 is viewed by the author as the real starting point of the Russia–West conflict and has been followed up by several disconcerting measures and actions that confirm changes in Russia’s ambitions and objectives.<sup>32</sup> It feeds the narrative of the new Russian assertiveness after Putin’s rise in the political arena, and also explains the mechanisms used to rebuild Russia as a major power, i.e., as increasing the role of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the more recent project of the Eurasian Union as counterweights to the European Union and NATO.<sup>33</sup> *Putin’s Wars* implies that the grand master and architect for reestablishing the Russian empire is its strongman and president.

The timeframe Putin has placed on his project clearly shows that the process to change the “world order”<sup>34</sup> requires patience and incremental steps on behalf of the political, military, and public spheres of Russian society.<sup>35</sup> Since the beginning of the millennium, the world has witnessed a Russia that has gradually transformed into a more nationalistic, one-party state, with extensive media control, fixed elections, a strengthened grip on civil society, and a more aggressive tone in foreign policy.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 78–84.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2014), 9.

<sup>35</sup> Van Herpen, 78-84.



According to *Norway and Russia–Security political challenges in the High North*<sup>36</sup> (authors translation of title) by Tormod Heier and Anders Kjølberg, this has “greatly contributed to a more confrontational line of rhetoric between Russia and the West.”<sup>37</sup> Combined, these aspects help to create an understanding of how Russia has become more self-assertive, and they establish a foundation to explain observations about Russia over the last two decades.

The wars with Georgia and Ukraine also permit an assessment of the state and development of the Russian military. Van Herpen claims that “regardless of Russia’s statements that the conflict with Georgia came as a surprise to them, he eludes that it was well planned by the Kremlin, and a part of Putin’s strategy and plans for years.”<sup>38</sup> The rapid war seemed to have been skillfully carried out, but it also was a revelation for the West as well as Russia with regards to the capabilities of its military forces.<sup>39</sup>

In the West at first, there was a tendency to look at this campaign as a success when it comes to conducting joint service and inter-agency operations. This perspective is in sharp contrast to Russian military analysts’ conclusions, which saw it as a semi-success. The Russian military leadership promised substantial changes and improvement, and a lot of the “effects of the actions taken after the war became apparent with the

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<sup>36</sup> Tormod Heier and Anders Kjølberg, *Norge og Russland: sikkerhetspolitiske utfordringer i nordområdene* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>38</sup> Van Herpen, 207.

<sup>39</sup> Heier and Kjølberg, 87.



improvements in military capabilities observed in Ukraine six years later.”<sup>40</sup> The effects of extensive investments, training, and exercise regimes were evident when Russia seized Crimea in a swift and well-coordinated operation in 2014.

The Russian wars with Georgia and Ukraine provide perspective to Russia’s relationship with the West, mainly NATO and the European Union. In the West and in the Baltic countries, there seems to be a widespread perception that “Russia cannot be trusted and that the country has become increasingly unpredictable.”<sup>41</sup> The deterioration in the Russia–West relationship has persisted since 2008 and is still on a similar trajectory. Russia and NATO, using rhetoric accusing each other of being aggressive, have noticeably contributed to the security situation in Europe today where Russia is perceived as a permanent military threat to its neighbors, particularly to the former Soviet states in the Baltics.<sup>42</sup> It is a common opinion in these works that the West should be concerned with Russia’s assertiveness, and Van Herpen even states that “it is time for the US, NATO and Europe to wake up and take European security seriously.”<sup>43</sup>

While Van Herpen does not discuss the High North and the Arctic in his security concerns, the co-authors of *Norway and Russia; Security Political Challenges in the High North* highlight Russia’s security policy and military behavior in the High North. Their general perception agrees with most other sources when addressing the importance of the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>42</sup> Van Herpen, 269.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 276.



High North and the Arctic region.<sup>44</sup> It also supports other work when it comes to analyzing and understanding Russian security policy and military strategic ambitions in the region, and how this policy is reflected in the observable military buildup and activity, especially in the North.<sup>45</sup> It seems that the situation in Ukraine has had an discernible impact on the relationship between Norway and Russia in several areas. Norway's Exercise Joint Viking 15 was the first military exercise in Finnmark in decades, and the implication is that since 2014 Norway has gradually turned away from its self-imposed restrictions and is showing more willingness to host allied exercises, and conduct independent exercises in this region of the country. This willingness leads to increased tensions between Russia and Norway.<sup>46</sup> This viewpoint is also supported by other sources that show that a closer co-operation between Norway, Sweden, and Finland in military exercises also contributes to more tension and less reassurance than was the case from the end of the Cold War up to the Ukrainian crisis. As Heier and Kjølberg note, "Norway still sees Russia as a partner in areas of common interests. This is reflected in common areas such as fisheries, coastguard, search and rescue and the Treaty on Maritime Delimitation from 2010."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Heier and Kjølberg, 72.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 74-76.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 66-68.



### Key Works on Russia and the High North

Apart from newspapers and media reports, which are often the first to publish information on ongoing events, academic journals often offer more thorough analysis. For this study, several reports from renowned institutes have been valuable. Most work on the High North and Arctic seems to agree on the heightened geopolitical role of the region. Russian objectives in the Arctic are according to *Russia's Arctic Security Policy-Still Quiet in the North?* by Ekaterina Klimenko quite clear, "Russia's policies and strategies reflects their ambition to continue to develop their role as the leading actor in the region."<sup>48</sup> Russia is the largest of the five littoral states of the Arctic Ocean, and will seek to maintain its leading role.<sup>49</sup> The High North and the Arctic are important for Russia for several reasons. First and foremost is the region's vast natural resources that represent a vital part of Russia's future economy.

Another reason for this region's importance is its military significance to Russia. The Kola Peninsula and the greater Murmansk region have played a vital strategic role for Russia for a long time. It was the site of British and United States intervention during World War I. It was a major Lend Lease destination during World War II as well as the site of the World's largest Arctic land battle in 1944.<sup>50</sup> Its importance continued

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<sup>48</sup> Ekaterina Klimenko, *Russia's Arctic Security Policy-Still quiet in the High North?* SIPRI Policy Paper no. 45 (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2016), 1.

<sup>49</sup> Lassi Heininen, Alexander Sergunin, and Gleb Yarovoy, *Russian Strategies in the Arctic: Avoiding a New Cold War* (Moscow: Valdai Discussion Club, 2014), 9, accessed November 27, 2016, [http://www.uarctic.org/media/857300/arctic\\_eng.pdf](http://www.uarctic.org/media/857300/arctic_eng.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> Gebhardt.



throughout the Cold War and continues to the present day. This region is critical for Russia to “protect its strategic nuclear forces stationed there, to secure access to the Atlantic Ocean, the Barents Sea for the Northern Fleet, and to defend the northern flank of the Russian Federation from the U.S. and NATO.”<sup>51</sup>

Russian Arctic and military strategy has changed on occasions since the beginning of the millennium. From approximately 2000, it was centered on co-operation and the peaceful settlement of disputes in the region, issuing statements saying that a “militarization of the region should be avoided.”<sup>52</sup> However, in the wake of the security situation in Europe, and especially after the Georgian and the Ukrainian Wars, there has been a marked shift in Russian policy and rhetoric.<sup>53</sup> The heightened interest of all Arctic States, to include a renewed NATO northern focus, seems to confirm those theories that view the security situation in Europe as spilling over into the Arctic.<sup>54</sup> The West’s sanctions regime has negatively affected relationships. In Russia, there is a “growing concern about increased NATO activity and presence in the Arctic.”<sup>55</sup>

This growing concern has, in turn, led to a substantial military modernization of the Russian forces in general. However, it is very observable in the High North and the

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<sup>51</sup> Heininen, Sergunin, and Yarovoy, 14-15.

<sup>52</sup> Klimenko, *Russia’s Arctic Security Policy*, 1.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>54</sup> Heininen, Sergunin, and Yarovoy, 15.

<sup>55</sup> Norwegian Intelligence Service, *Annual Assessment by The Norwegian Intelligence Service–FOCUS 2015* (Oslo: Norwegian Intelligence Service, 2015), 22, accessed November 27, 2016, [https://forsvaret.no/fakta\\_/ForsvaretDocuments/Focus2015-ENG](https://forsvaret.no/fakta_/ForsvaretDocuments/Focus2015-ENG).



Russian Arctic Zone.<sup>56</sup> For neighboring countries, Russia's increased military activities have caused concerns over the last years. Norway, as a NATO member, has called for more NATO focus in the region and reinforced the notion of collective defense.

Sweden and Finland are having discussions on joining NATO and have extended bi-lateral defense cooperation and multilateral cooperation through NORDEFCO.<sup>57</sup> All Scandinavian countries have increased their spending and the development of military capabilities in the wake of the Russian build up.

The modernization program has been followed by a change in Russian military exercises. That the military must conduct more deliberate exercises is not new, but the number of exercises and the growing complexity witnessed since 2010, and especially since 2013 to present day, clearly demonstrate the Russian armed forces increased capability. Johan Norberg, a colleague at the Swedish Defence Research Institute in Stockholm has done an in-depth analysis of major Russian military exercises from 2011 to 2104. According to Norberg, "Snap exercises were re-introduced in 2013 in addition to regular strategic and parallel exercises."<sup>58</sup> Military exercises are being conducted all over Russia from the High North through the Baltic Sea area; along its western border to the Black Sea and all the way to the Far East.<sup>59</sup> All sources used for this study agree that the Russian military has made substantial improvements when it comes to command and

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<sup>56</sup> Klimenko, *Russia's Arctic Security Policy*, 18.

<sup>57</sup> Edward Lucas, *The Coming Storm: Baltic Sea Security Report* (Washington, DC: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2015), 5.

<sup>58</sup> Norberg, 23-24.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.



control, combat readiness, the ability to mobilize on short notice, strategic movement and reinforcements, combat power, and that it poses an increased threat to potential adversaries and neighbors.<sup>60</sup> Also noted in these works is that the increased exercise activity is done in “response to NATO exercises and activities conducted in Europe.”<sup>61</sup>

What is clear is that Russia, through the size, complexity, and scope of the many exercises it has conducted, appears to be preparing for large-scale, intra-state conflicts and wars.

#### Online Sources; Academic Journals, Articles, and Newspapers

The contemporaneous nature of the subject in this study has necessitated the use of online sources such as academic journals, newspapers, and articles from a diverse range of think tanks and news agencies to provide more insight and enable the analysis of the actual Russian Snap exercise.

English translations of Russian articles proved quite valuable to this research.<sup>62</sup> The Jamestown Foundation–Eurasia Daily Monitor, as well as the European Leadership Network, have also been good sources for getting data on the actual Russian snap exercise. In addition, newspapers have proven valuable in gaining official statements

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 54-57.

<sup>61</sup> Ian Kearns and Lukasz Kulesa, “Preparing for the Worst: Are Russian and NATO Military Exercises Making War in Europe More Likely?” European Leadership Network, August 12, 2015, accessed March 18, 2017, [http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/preparing-for-the-worst-are-russian-and-nato-military-exercises-making-war-in-europe-more-likely\\_2997.html](http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/preparing-for-the-worst-are-russian-and-nato-military-exercises-making-war-in-europe-more-likely_2997.html).

<sup>62</sup> This collection of articles was provided to the author by Mr. Mark Wilcox–MMAS committee member.



released from government, military leaders, and other relevant actors from Russia, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and NATO. The Independent Barents Observer, a journalist-owned newspaper that covers the Barents Region and the Arctic has been valuable in gaining perspectives and news presented from both Norway and Russia. The author has also used a variety of news agencies such as BBC, The Economist, and others to help balance and maintain objectivity throughout the process.

### So, What?

The available literature shows the growing importance of the Arctic region and the High North, which is evident for Russia through its focus on the region, military presence and buildup, modernization of forces, and infrastructure development from the Kola Peninsula throughout its Arctic zone. Russia's assertiveness and the fact that they have used military power on several occasions from Georgia to Ukraine, feed the perception in the West that Russia has emerged as a real security threat. From the Russian standpoint, it also seems that they perceive NATO as its main security threat. Russia has used military exercises extensively to test and demonstrate combat readiness, and that Russian military capabilities have consequences for its neighbors and NATO.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and the Valdai club reports are very precise in laying out Russian strategies, ambitions, and details on the military buildup. These works agree on the importance of the High North but differ as to the exact reasons for the military buildup are, and they also differ on what the military exercises are and what the consequences might be. Norberg's study on Russian exercises is very detailed in the timeframe from 2011 to 2014, and his report explained the possible consequences they have, especially for Russia's closest neighbors. However, Norberg



does not deal with the specific exercise relevant to this study, which has necessitated the use of contemporary sources online to supplement and provide data for the analysis in Chapter 4. Newspapers and media articles provided a detailed picture of the snap exercise in March 2015, with a level of detail and fidelity that supplements other works. Online newspapers such as The Independent Barents Observer and others, have provided statements and insight on all topics dealt with, and this material has supplemented the key sources used for this study.

In summation, literature on the wider topic of Russian, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, and NATO relationships, roles and interest in the High North and Europe; Russian military development; Russian military exercises; the contemporary environment in the High North, the Baltic Sea region and Europe; and the current and projected future of the situation regarding the mentioned regions is available in the annexed bibliography. The amount of retrievable data for this contemporary study continues to grow as the situation in Europe develops. Academic work also exists on Russian military exercises. The author has experienced difficulties in finding reliable data that directly addresses the political and military implications that the Russian snap exercise produced. This gap is what the author is aiming to address through this study. The High North and the Baltic Sea Area are subjects for more detailed studies, and it is the authors goal that this study can provide input.

The quality of all research is dependent on whether it is conducted in a responsible scientific manner and the data reliability and validity are central to this effort. The author does not know the Russian language, which limits his access to resources and may limit the validity of the analysis in chapter 4. There are, however, several Russian



primary sources in English, and combined with the available amount of secondary sources, this challenge seems to be surmountable. The problem with these secondary sources is that they have already gone through an interpretation and translation, and there is an inherent risk that details are lost and mistakes are made in interpreting primary sources. Another challenge is that the author has selected sources from the Russian and Norwegian point of view to achieve objectivity as far as possible, but the risk of his own biases and the ability to judge fairly are present.



## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

Chapter 2 reviewed the existing relevant literature on the historical background of the Kola Peninsula and the greater Murmansk region. Several books, reports, and documents describe the Russian position related to the High North and the Arctic. Further the preceding chapter describes Russia's deteriorated relation with the West and NATO and Russia's assertive behavior over the last decade. Chapter 2 describes Russian military modernization and reforms and how these changes have affected the development of military exercises.

Chapter 3 will identify the methodology used to answer the primary research question: What are the potential implications of this exercise? Further, the author will answer the supporting secondary research questions in sequence. What was exercise Joint Viking 2015? What was the Russian snap exercise? Was the Russian snap exercise a response to Joint Viking 2015? What broader Russian interests were involved in the snap exercise? This chapter will identify the type of research, the method used to answer each secondary question, and how these answers will assist in answering the primary research question.



### Type of Research

The organizing framework for this thesis is based on materials provided by the Director of Graduate Degree Programs, US Army Command and General Staff College.<sup>63</sup>

The research question suggests that the methodology best-suited is the qualitative method, adhering to the steps of the scientific method.<sup>64</sup> Qualitative research will use the single case study of the Russian snap exercise and will be followed by examining four possible explanations for why Russia conducted this snap exercise. By compiling and comparing these conclusions, the author will answer the primary research question: What are the potential implications of the Russian snap exercise?

### Procedure

The overall procedure will be conducted as a single case study, followed by a sequential analysis of four possible explanations for why it was conducted. This approach is well suited to investigate this exercise in depth and “within its real-world context.”<sup>65</sup> This framework lays the foundation to produce an in-depth understanding of the potential implications of the Russian snap exercise. However, using a single case study does not allow for a wider generalization for providing definitive answers to explain Russian

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<sup>63</sup> U.S Army Command and General Staff College, Student Text 20-10, *Master of Military Art and Science (MMAS) Research and Thesis* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: CGSC, August 2016).

<sup>64</sup> This is how Mr. David T. Culkin, Graduate Degree Program briefed and displayed the steps of qualitative research method in a class on Advanced Research Methods, September 12, 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 16.



behavior, and thus narrows the conclusions that can be drawn. To enable a wider generalization on Russian behavior, a multiple case study approach would be necessary to provide enough data to compare and contrast and provide more accurate and broader conclusions.<sup>66</sup> However, the scope and limitations of this study do not allow such an approach.

The case study of the Russian snap exercise will examine what took place chronologically from the exercise's beginning to its end. The author will use collected data and information on the exercise from a Russian as well as a Western perspective to provide the reader with an in-depth understanding of the exercise. This section will examine the exercise with a level of detail and fidelity that are general but specific enough to answer secondary research question number two: What was the Russian snap exercise?

Following this section, the first explanation that will be examined is if the Russian snap exercise can be explained as a reaction to Norway's Exercise Joint Viking 2015 or if it was a wider message to Norway, Sweden, and Finland. The second explanation that will be analyzed is whether the Russian snap exercise was about the High North and the Arctic region. Explanation number three will attempt to produce an understanding of whether the exercise was a reaction and a message to NATO, considering the alliances' posture and actions in Europe and especially in the Baltic Sea area over the last years. The last explanation is to determine if this exercise was more related to the reform and

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 63-64.



modernization process that the Russian military has gone through over the last years and will also consider military exercises.

The second secondary question is: What was the Russian snap exercise? Chapter 4 will initially answer this question by presenting a single case study of the Russian snap exercise.

The third secondary question is: Was the Russian exercise a response to Joint Viking 2015? This question is particularly important since the thesis that the author initially had, was that it was a direct response to it. This answer will be partially answered through the Russian exercise case study. However, to produce a more detailed answer to the question, the author will analyze the first explanation. The explanation that will be examined is if the Russian snap exercise can be explained as a reaction to Norway's Exercise Joint Viking, or if it was a wider message to Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

The final secondary question is: What broader Russian interests were involved in the snap exercise? The answer to this question has three explanations that will be examined in sequence: firstly, if the Russian snap exercise was about the High North and the Arctic region; followed by, if the exercise was a reaction and a message to NATO, considering the alliances' posture and actions in Europe and especially in the Baltic Sea area over the last years. Lastly, it will examine if this exercise was related to the reform and modernization process that the Russian military have gone through over the last few years, which is still ongoing, including military exercises as part of this process.

### Summary and Conclusion

A clear and complete description of the specific steps to be followed during the research was provided. The emphasis was on the case study and the explanations chosen



that will be used to answer the secondary research questions, and subsequently enable the author to answer the primary research question. Chapter 4 will answer the secondary research questions, provide details necessary for the reader to understand the overall situation, and set the stage for the primary research question to be answered in chapter 5.



## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

#### Introduction

In the following sections, the author will analyze four explanations for why Russia conducted this snap exercise. In the first section, the author will attempt to answer whether the Russian snap exercise was a direct response to Norway's exercise Joint Viking? To do this, the author will present the case study of the exercise as it unfolded in the High North and analyze the evidence. In the following sections, the four explanations will be analyzed to answer the remaining secondary questions, and ultimately, to produce the answer to the primary research question.

#### The Case Study: Russian Snap Exercise in March 2015

The Russian snap exercise began on 16 March by directive of President Putin, the Russian Federation Armed Forces Supreme Commander-in-Chief.<sup>67</sup> It commenced with the mobilization of Northern Fleet but quickly encompassed and involved four military districts and was conducted throughout the entire Russian Federation.<sup>68</sup> "This exercise

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<sup>67</sup> Interfax, "Summary as Russian Snap Drills End from Arctic to Black Sea," March 20, 2015, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.militarynews.ru>. Courtesy translation by Mr. Mark Wilcox-MMAS committee member.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Frear, Ian Kearns, and Lukasz Kulesa, "Preparing for the Worst: Are Russian and NATO Military Exercises Making War in Europe More Likely?" European Leadership Network, August 7, 2015, accessed October 15, 2016, <http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/medialibrary/2015/08/07/ea2b8c22/Preparing%20for%20the%20Worst.pdf>.



involved approximately 38,000 personnel, 3,360 pieces of military equipment, 41 warships, 15 submarines, and 110 aircraft and helicopters.”<sup>69</sup>

One stated purpose of the exercise was that it was training for the territorial defense of Russia’s peripheral regions and specifically focused on the “Kola Peninsula and the Arctic islands along the Northern Sea route, the enclave in Kaliningrad, Crimea and the Black Sea and the Sakhalin Island in the Far East.”<sup>70</sup> Russian officials publicly criticized the ongoing Norwegian exercise and accused Norway and NATO of deliberately provoking Russia by conducting this exercise so close to the common border.<sup>71</sup> However, as far as the author can identify, there are no accounts stating that the Russian snap exercise was a direct response to the Norwegian exercise. According to Russian official sources, the exercise was planned to “verify combat readiness of the Northern Fleet and the relatively new Joint Strategic Command North as the headquarters in charge.”<sup>72</sup> Minister of Defense, Sergey Shoygu, stated that the reason for this exercise was “that new challenges and threats to military security require the combat capabilities

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<sup>69</sup> Thomas Frear, “Anatomy of a Russian Exercise,” European Leadership Network, August 12, 2015, accessed October 1, 2016, [http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/anatomy-of-a-russian-exercise\\_2914.html](http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/anatomy-of-a-russian-exercise_2914.html).

<sup>70</sup> Jörgen Elfving, “Novel Developments in Russia's Latest Snap Exercise,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 13, no. 148 (September 14, 2016), accessed February 25, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/novel-developments-in-russias-latest-snap-exercise/>.

<sup>71</sup> The Local, “Norway Arctic Exercise ‘A Provocation’: Russia,” March 18, 2015, accessed March 19, 2017, <https://www.thelocal.no/20150318/norway-arctic-exercise-a-provocation-russia>.

<sup>72</sup> Aleksei Nikolsky, “New Strategic Command Based on the Northern Fleet Has Been Submitted to a Snap Inspection,” *Vedemosti*, March 16, 2015, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.vedemosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2015/03/16/ledovitii-otvet>.



of the Armed Forces to be further enhanced and particular attention to be paid to the state of the newly formed strategic force in the northern sector.”<sup>73</sup> An unidentified defense ministry source indicated that the exercise was intended to send a message to NATO, demonstrating that Russia is ready for war and can counter the deployment of US and NATO forces to the Baltic, Romania, Poland, and Bulgaria.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, Dimitriy Peskov, President Putin’s spokesman, stated that there was “no connection between the snap exercises and NATO’s intensified activity in East Europe.”<sup>75</sup> Other Russian authorities announced again that the exercise’s purpose was to verify the combat readiness of the Joint Arctic Strategic Command, the Northern Fleet, the Western Military District, the Airborne Troops, the newly formed Arctic Brigade, and to explore the possibilities of reinforcing the formations with forces from other MDs.<sup>76</sup>

When it comes to the choice of location for the snap exercise, there may be other reasons than the abovementioned ones. According to a high-level military official, the main part of the inspection occurred in the view of NATO intelligence capabilities, and demonstrated Russian combat readiness and that this exercise was an response to US and

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<sup>73</sup> Interfax, “Summary as Russian Snap Drills End from Arctic to Black Sea.”

<sup>74</sup> Pavel Felgenhauer, “Putin Mobilizes Forces Preparing to Fight with NATO and US,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 12, no. 51 (March 19, 2015), accessed March 18, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/putin-mobilizes-forces-preparing-to-fight-with-nato-and-us/>.

<sup>75</sup> RIA Novosti, “Russian Snap Drills Unconnected to NATO Activity in Europe—Putin Spokesman,” March 24, 2015, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://ria.ru/>. Courtesy translation by Mr. Mark Wilcox-MMAS Committee member.

<sup>76</sup> Felgenhauer.



other NATO forces deployment to the Baltics, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria.<sup>77</sup> Further, this official explains that the location also demonstrates the lack of desire to move to unnecessary confrontation—otherwise the inspection would have been declared in the Western Military District.<sup>78</sup>

Some reports stated that this exercise was not announced through normal channels or in accordance with agreements.<sup>79</sup> This contention is supported by Pavel Felgenhauer, who states that “Moscow apparently did not give Western nations any prior notification about what was going to happen.”<sup>80</sup> However, Defense Minister Shoygu, stated that “all European countries have been notified through the channels of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to ensure transparency and openness, even though the parameters of the exercise did not exceed the limits and we could have skipped it.”<sup>81</sup> Deputy Defense Minister Anatoliy Antonov also stated that “prior notification on the snap exercise was delivered to OSCE members as a goodwill gesture, even though the number of personnel and equipment did not exceed the levels subject to provisions of the

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<sup>77</sup> Nikolsky.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Artem Kureev, “Why Cold War-Style Military Exercises of Russia and NATO are Heating Up,” Russia Direct, March 24, 2015, accessed March 19, 2017, <http://www.russia-direct.org/analysis/why-cold-war-style-military-exercises-russia-and-nato-are-heating>.

<sup>80</sup> Felgenhauer.

<sup>81</sup> Interfax, “Troops, Command Bodies Back at Home Bases after Combat Readiness Inspection—Shoigu,” March 24, 2015, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://interfax.com>. Courtesy translation by Mr. Mark Wilcox-MMAS committee member.



Vienna Document of 2011 and subject to early notification.”<sup>82</sup> Regarding notification and the OSCE, it is, however, interesting to note that the OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation that took place on the 18<sup>83</sup> and the 25<sup>84</sup> March did not reflect statements by the Russian delegation to inform the Forum for Security Cooperation about the snap exercise.

The following abstract of the Russian snap exercise is not exhaustive or complete but presents the major actions by the Russian Armed Forces between March 16 and March 21.

The exercise’s first stage was to put the Northern Fleet on full alert before it was deployed to the Barents and Norwegian Seas to conduct anti-submarine and anti-mine operations. Airborne units from the Western Military district were mobilized and brought to full combat readiness before being deployed by air to the Kola Peninsula and the Arctic Islands in Russia’s High North. The Northern Fleet coastal forces assumed to include the 61st Naval Infantry Brigade and the 200th Coastal Motorized Rifle Brigade, moved from their bases to positions on the Kola Peninsula. At the same time on the 16th of March, the 98th Ivanovo Airborne Division (Central Military District) assembled with

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<sup>82</sup> Interfax, “Russia Notified OSCE States of Snap Military Drill—Deputy Defense Minister,” March 17, 2015, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://militarynews.ru>. Courtesy translation by Mr. Mark Wilcox-MMAS committee member.

<sup>83</sup> Organization for Security for Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), “Journal of the 783rd Plenary Meeting of the Forum for Security Co-operation,” March 18, 2015, accessed March 21, 2017, <http://www.osce.org/fsc/146111?download=true>.

<sup>84</sup> Organization for Security for Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), “Journal of the 784th Plenary Meeting of the Forum for Security Co-operation,” March 25, 2015, accessed March 21, 2017, <http://www.osce.org/fsc/148071?download=true>.



weapons and equipment and moved to staging areas awaiting aerial transport to the High North.<sup>85</sup>

The next day, 17 March, the division loaded onto transport aircraft. Also on the same day, the Northern Fleet deployed anti-submarine warfare aerial assets to the Barents Sea and initiated anti-submarine operations. The Northern Fleet ships did execute a two-sided exercise in the Barents Sea with the objective to protect Russia's Arctic borders against maritime threats.<sup>86</sup> The arctic ground formations, assumed to be the 80th Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade and 200th Coastal Motorized Rifle Brigade, in Pechenga and Allakurti completed defensive fortifications and conducted reconnaissance operations. For "the 80th Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade, this was the first time they participated in a snap exercise after being declared full operational capable in January 2015."<sup>87</sup> Marines, assumed to be the 61st Naval Infantry Brigade, loaded onto amphibious ships at the Kola Peninsula and prepared for operations. The Northern Fleet started training its air defense units, targeting strategic bombers, transport aircraft, and fighters. Naval strike forces, including anti-submarine ships, conducted joint exercises in the Barents Sea.<sup>88</sup>

On 18 March, subunits from the 98th Ivanovo Airborne Division redeployed from its staging area to an airfield on the Kola Peninsula, some 1500 kilometers from its home

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<sup>85</sup> Frear.

<sup>86</sup> Interfax, "Summary as Russian Snap Drills End from Arctic to Black Sea."

<sup>87</sup> Interfax, "Russian News Agencies Give Details of First Two Days of Snap Military Exercise," March 17, 2015, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://militarynews.ru>. Courtesy translation by Mr. Mark Wilcox-MMAS committee member.

<sup>88</sup> Frear.



base. The Northern Fleets naval forces continued joint exercises in the Barents Sea, including simulated naval battles with use of torpedoes and shipborne artillery. Airborne units landed for reconnaissance missions on Novaya Zemlya and Franz Josef Land. Their task was to “strengthen the protection and defense of strategically important facilities in the Arctic, and ensure the safe landing of the main force.”<sup>89</sup> They conducted simulated combat training on the islands. “The 200th Brigade moved from Pechenga to conduct simulated combat in areas near Murmansk and were supported by air forces and heavy rocket artillery.”<sup>90</sup>

On 19 March, naval forces conducted anti-mining operations in the Barents Sea, while strategic bombers from Engels Air Force Base simulated attacks on the Kola Peninsula to test radar and command and communications systems. The same day, “airmobile special forces landed from 20 helicopters at the Severomorsk-3 airport in a simulated combat exercise. Offensive fighters supported strategic bombers over the Barents Sea and trained in intercepting hostile air targets.”<sup>91</sup>

On 20 March, over 50 fighter bombers and helicopters conducted a simulated attack on an enemy column on the Kola Peninsula. In the Sevoromorsk area, army aviation helicopters and artillery provided fire support to mechanized infantry and airborne units during a special operation exercise to destroy a notional large enemy

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<sup>89</sup> Interfax, “Summary as Russian Snap Drills End from Arctic to Black Sea.”

<sup>90</sup> Frear.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.



contingent. At the same time, “naval aviation fighters conducted more than 30 interceptions of simulated hostile aircrafts over the Barents Sea.”<sup>92</sup>

The above narrative paints a broad-brush picture of actions and activities that took place in the High North under the command of the Joint Strategic Command North, which according to Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu was designated to help the JSCN in the Arctic for the first time since becoming operational to work on command and control.<sup>93</sup> However, this snap exercise in the North did not occur in total isolation. Several formations and military units in the Western, Southern, Central, and Eastern Military Districts, to include Naval Forces Airborne Troops, Long-Range Aviation, and Military Transport Aviation, were also alerted and carried out exercises all over the Russian Federation.<sup>94</sup> Though the exercise was centered on the JSCN, it was extended and covered most of Russia’s national territory with extensive military drills in the Baltic region, the Black Sea, Crimea, the Far East, and Central Russia.<sup>95</sup> The Black Sea Fleet and the Baltic Sea Fleet were mobilized and conducted separate but coordinated exercises in their areas of operation.<sup>96</sup> Strategic bombers deployed to Crimea, Kaliningrad were reinforced with Iskander missile systems delivered by the Baltic Fleet’s landing ships,

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<sup>92</sup> Frear.

<sup>93</sup> Interfax, “Summary as Russian Snap Drills End from Arctic to Black Sea.”

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Felgenhauer.

<sup>96</sup> Channel 1 TV, “Large-Scale Military Exercise Spans ‘The Whole of Russia’-TV report,” March 18, 2015, accessed March 15, 2017. Courtesy translation by Mr. Mark Wilcox-MMAS committee member.



and live fire exercises on land and at sea took place.<sup>97</sup> According to Lithuanian Armed Forces Commander Major General Jonas-Vytautas, “the Russian exercise in the Kaliningrad region involved more forces than the size of the three Baltic armies combined, and Lithuanian forces as well as NATO’s air police mission based in the country were on maximum combat readiness during the exercise.”<sup>98</sup> The totality of this strategic exercise was also controlled and coordinated in real time from the National Defense Control Centre in Moscow, which confirms that this was not an exercise conducted under the command of the Joint Strategic Command North alone.<sup>99</sup>

### Summary and Findings

This abbreviated description focused on the snap exercise from 16-21 March and the activity that took place in the Northern Fleet area of responsibility, including troop movement to the north from other military districts. However, it is worth mentioning that the exercise expanded and encompassed high levels of training activity in the Baltics, in the vicinity of Crimea and the Black Sea, as well as on the eastern coasts of Russia and seems to have been coordinated with that in the North. The justification and the reasons given by Russian officials appear to indicate that this exercise was focused on defending the Russian borders in the Arctic. A strong emphasis on defending the strategic bases on the Kola Peninsula and the Arctic archipelagoes seems to corroborate that this was a

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<sup>97</sup> Interfax, “Summary as Russian Snap Drills End from Arctic to Black Sea.”

<sup>98</sup> Interfax, “Lithuanian Armed Forces on Highest Alert during Russian Military Exercise,” March 23, 2015, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://interfax.com>. Courtesy translation by Mr. Mark Wilcox-MMAS committee member.

<sup>99</sup> Interfax, “Summary as Russian Snap Drills End from Arctic to Black Sea.”



simulated defense against US and NATO, and not so much against Norway or the Norwegian ongoing exercise. The central message from the Russian Ministry of Defense was that this was a defensive exercise with a strong focus on its outlying regions in the High North, the Baltics, and the Black Sea. This message seems credible and is supported through the actions observed.

Whether Russia did give prior notification through OSCE channels of this snap exercise is hard to determine based on the evidence presented. As far as the author can conclude, no hard evidence suggests that they provided prior notification of this exercise.

So, what was this snap exercise all about? It seems that it was about demonstrating to Russia's neighbors and especially NATO and the US, that Russia can rapidly mobilize the nation's armed forces in a very short time. The rapidity in mobilization, the timeframe from when units are alerted to deployment to their operating areas, is also evidence that Russia's response time from identification of a threat to response is very short.

The exercise, as it was conducted, was clearly complex and demanding in terms of command and control. Russia did, arguably, train their chain of command from the Joint Strategic Command North, the Strategic Commands in the other Military District, and it was led by the General Staff from the National Defense Control Centre in Moscow.

Russia clearly demonstrated its combat readiness and that they can rapidly shift forces and mass combat power in its interior.<sup>100</sup> The exercise also demonstrated the use

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<sup>100</sup> Norberg, 61.



of strategic transportation, especially rail lines but also strategic air assets, and underlines their ability to reinforce other sectors with additional forces not organic to the command.

That the exercise spread from the High North and encompassed the entire nation, seems to validate that this was a part of a broader message than Norway's exercise. This fact is further supported since the Russians did not seem to simulate attacks or military actions against Norway as such, except from a defensive posture in the border region. The focus and simulations suggest that the Russians defended the Arctic borders of the country with special emphasis towards their archipelagoes. Submarines seems to have established the Bastion Defense, which is the way Russia will prevent US and NATO submarines and forces access to the region.

As far as the author is able to interpret from the evidence, the Russian snap exercise appears to have been directed more towards the US and NATO, and no evidence supports that this exercise was a direct response to Norway's Joint Viking 15.

Therefore, the answer to secondary question number two is that this Russian snap exercise was not a direct response to Norway's exercise. Thus, it is necessary to study other explanations and in the next paragraph, the author will examine the relationship between Russia, Norway, Sweden, and Finland and attempt to determine if the snap exercise was related to this the relationships between Russia and the above mentioned countries.



### Russia's Relationship with Norway, Sweden, and Finland

Of the four Scandinavian countries, Norway and Denmark are NATO members, while Finland and Sweden are no longer nonaligned, but still neutral.<sup>101</sup> However, Finland and Sweden are members of the European Union, while Norway is not. Finland and Sweden are (as is Russia) members of NATO's Partnership for Peace but have protected their neutrality by not becoming formal members of the alliance. The three countries share a land border, and Norway and Finland share land borders with Russia. Finland and Sweden are also joined with Russia through their access to the Baltic Sea. All three nations have strong interests in the Arctic and the High North, and the countries share extensive common interests as Arctic states and members of the Arctic Council. The question of NATO membership for Sweden and Finland is a sensitive issue, both domestically and with relation to Russia. After the Ukraine crisis, the debate in Finland and Sweden heated up, and there was a significant shift in public opinion in favor of joining the alliance.<sup>102</sup> NATO membership appears as a non-viable option for Sweden and Finland in the short term. However, should the countries apply for membership, only smaller adjustments would be needed to the agreements in place.<sup>103</sup>

For Norway, NATO is the backbone of national security, and Norway is one of the lead advocates for revitalizing the collective defense capabilities. Norway has, in the

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<sup>101</sup> Stefan Forss and Pekka Holopainen, *Breaking the Nordic Defense Deadlock* (Carlisle, PA: United States Army War College Press, 2015), 35.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>103</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 46.



wake of the Ukrainian crisis, called for concrete plans for the defense of the country, and these initiatives have produced results. NATO has embraced Norway's initiative, revised its Strategic Concept in 2010, and taken further steps to strengthen the alliance's collective defensive capabilities in 2014.<sup>104</sup> Norway has, as a part of this revitalization plan, hosted NATO exercises, initiated allied military presence on Norwegian soil, and made plans to further expand these activities in the future.

The Baltic States, including Sweden and Finland, are randomly subjected to pressure from Russia and perceive the situation as challenging. Sweden and Finland, which Russia considers Western and NATO-friendly, are growing increasingly concerned about Russia's behavior in the region.<sup>105</sup> Russia has responded to Sweden and Finland's NATO rhetoric by intimidation tactics over the last years. In 2013, "Russian fighters staged a mock attack on Sweden, and at the time NATO's Baltic air policing mission responded while Sweden did not react."<sup>106</sup> In March of 2014, Russia carried out a military exercise in an area near the small, but strategically important island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea.<sup>107</sup> Sweden later responded by permanently stationing troops on this island in "fear of Russian plans to seize it."<sup>108</sup> Over the past several years, all three countries

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>106</sup> Sarah Steffen, "NATO next for Sweden and Finland?" World, March 26, 2014, accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/nato-next-for-sweden-and-finland/a-17519846>.

<sup>107</sup> Steffen.

<sup>108</sup> Jack Schofield, "Why Sweden is Putting Troops on this Idyllic Holiday Island," The Local, September 14, 2016, accessed March 21, 2017,



have experienced Russian assertiveness. Militarily, they have been exposed to the buildup along their borders, seen increased exercise activity near their borders, and in certain cases, also witnessed the breach of sovereign territory. Russia has fortified its military presence in the Arctic zone by establishing the 80th Independent Motorized Rifle Brigade in Alakurti, which is only 60km from the Finnish border. However, Russian statements argue that this unit is a part of the overall strategy designated to “strengthen the country’s defense capabilities against the west, and improve their territorial claims over areas in the Arctic and are not directed against Finland as such.”<sup>109</sup> This unit observed the Russian snap exercise in March 2015, but it appears only to have played a role in the defensive posture against the border and was not participating in other maneuvers.<sup>110</sup> Russian fighters have on occasions breached both Swedish and Finish airspace, and alleged Russian submarines have violated Sweden’s territorial waters.<sup>111</sup> The Baltic Sea region is important to Russia as a gateway to Central and Western Europe

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<https://www.thelocal.se/20160914/why-is-sweden-stationing-troops-on-gotland-important>.

<sup>109</sup> Damien Sharkov, “Russian Troops Stationed Near Finnish Border as Putin Begins Move on Arctic,” *Newsweek*, March 13, 2016, accessed March 21, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/3000-russian-troops-stationed-near-finish-border-putin-makes-moves-arctic-299129>.

<sup>110</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, “Chief of Gen Staff Briefs Defense Minister on Progress of Snap Combat Readiness Inspection,” March 18, 2015, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.mil.ru>. Courtesy translation by Mr. Mark Wilcox-MMAS committee member.

<sup>111</sup> Jorge Benitez, “The Bully to the East,” *U.S. News and World Report*, August 6, 2015, accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/world-report/2015/08/06/russia-bullies-sweden-and-finland-away-from-joining-nato>.



by sea and air.<sup>112</sup> The region is also clearly an area of real concern for Russia, and Russia is concerned with Sweden and Finland's stance on joining NATO. Explicit threats have also been put forward to the two. Russia's ambassador to Sweden, Viktor Tatarintsev, warned that if "Sweden or Finland tried to join NATO, there would be consequences, and the consequences would be the military kind. He pointed out that these threats came directly from President Putin."<sup>113</sup>

Norway, Sweden, and Finland have, however, long understood that extended military cooperation is necessary, especially given the decline in military capabilities in all countries over the last decade. Thus, NORDEFCO was established in 2009 (which also includes Denmark and Iceland), with the stated aim of "strengthening the participating nations' national defense, exploring common synergies and facilitating efficient common solutions."<sup>114</sup> Sweden and Finland want to develop a closer relationship with NATO, partially by participating in NATO operations such as Kosovo and Afghanistan. Both have done so quite extensively since 2001 and participate in NATO exercises.<sup>115</sup> Sweden and Finland signed a bilateral military cooperation deal in 2014, to strengthen their ties and explore possibilities in certain areas where they will be stronger united than apart.<sup>116</sup> Norway has also strengthened defense cooperation in

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<sup>112</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 16.

<sup>113</sup> Benitez.

<sup>114</sup> Forss and Holopainen, 27.

<sup>115</sup> Steffen.

<sup>116</sup> Forss and Holopainen, 31.



bilateral and multilateral settings over the years. The US is especially important to Norway as its main ally in the event of a crisis or war. Cold War agreements have been revoked, and prepositioning of military equipment and arrangements for military reinforcement of Norway's defense are parts of this.<sup>117</sup>

The relationship between Russia and Norway, Sweden, and Finland has deteriorated since the Ukrainian Crisis in 2014. The Baltic Sea region and the High North are geostrategic important areas for all parties, and the nations' security is closely tied with the issues at play between them today. While Norway as a NATO member has historically experienced a favorable climate for communication and cooperation with Russia since the end of the Cold War, this is no longer the clear case.

Russia and Norway are still facing challenges associated with overlapping interests and goals that the nations have in the High North. Although the Delimitation Treaty of 2010 removed the most pressing obstacle to bilateral cooperation, there is still an area of concern that is not settled. The Delimitation Treaty from 2010 has established the borders on the continental shelf between Russia and Norway in the Barents Sea, but for the remainder of the continental shelf in the High North, this region is still not agreed upon, which may be one of the reasons for Russia's hardline policy in the region over recent years.<sup>118</sup> The topic of Svalbard is addressed as an area that presents specific issues

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<sup>117</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 43-44.

<sup>118</sup> Heier and Kjølberg, 15.



in the relationship that “potentially could lead to conflict between the nations, not necessarily military but it cannot be discarded as well.”<sup>119</sup>

### Summary and Findings

The Russian snap exercise was initiated in the High North and the Arctic. Most military activity that took place centered on the Kola Peninsula and the greater Murmansk region. The overall objective seemed to have been focused on defending the installations and the Russian strategic nuclear capabilities as well as defending the length of Russia’s Arctic border against hostile military aggression. There is insufficient evidence to support the hypothesis that the relationship between Russia, Norway, Sweden, and Finland was the main reason for conducting this exercise. However, the relationships and tensions over the last years were addressed by the signal Russia transmitted to the Scandinavian Countries.

There is insufficient evidence to say that the snap exercise can be explained as a reaction to Sweden’s and Finland’s security situation and their discussions on joining NATO. However, the snap exercise appears to have constituted a message and a warning to Sweden and Finland that attempts to forge closer ties with NATO will prompt appropriate reactions from Russia. The next paragraph will consider the third explanation and attempt to determine if this snap exercise was about Russia and the High North.

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<sup>119</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 33-34.



### Russia and the High North

The High North and the Arctic region have become more important to Russia since 2010. A part of Russian assertiveness has been to develop and publish new strategies, to include their stated ambitions to be the world's leading actor in the Arctic. This intent is clearly demonstrated through noticeably increased Russian military activity in the High North since 2008.<sup>120</sup>

The 2009 National Security Strategy states that the Arctic and the Barents Sea are potential areas of competition for resources, but the “2008 Foundations of the Arctic Policy also highlights that “keeping the Arctic a zone of peace and cooperation is among Russia’s top priorities.”<sup>121</sup> The region is undergoing major changes, and Russian authorities aim to develop the region into the country’s foremost strategic base for natural resources by 2020.<sup>122</sup> Reduced ice coverage and ice volumes will make larger areas accessible. In turn, this development means easier access to natural resources, especially oil and gas, which are vital for the Russian economy. Reduction in ice coverage will also improve conditions for such issues as shipping, tourism, and fishing. The Northern Sea Route is given growing attention for the importance it will play for transport into and out of Russia’s Arctic Region, and Russian authorities are investing heavily on developing this route. However, a “major increase in traffic through the Arctic is not expected in the

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<sup>120</sup> Heier and Kjølberg, 14.

<sup>121</sup> Klimenko, *Russia’s Arctic Security Policy*, 14.

<sup>122</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 20.



foreseeable future due to that the majority of commercial ships are not capable of operating in the region due to ice.”<sup>123</sup>

In 2008, Russia’s Arctic policy focused on cooperation and major efforts were taken to create formal agreements between the five Arctic coastal states (Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the USA), which would assist in settling future overlapping claims in the region, as well as limiting involvement by non-Arctic states. United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea regulates claims to the continental shelf. Russia and Denmark have submitted contesting claims to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.<sup>124</sup> Canada is also likely to forward claims to the same seabed. These overlapping claims can potentially increase tensions between the involved nations as stated. “While these extensive and partly overlapping claims could spark tension in the region, they are unlikely to lead to confrontation or conflict.”<sup>125</sup>

In the 2008 to 2013 period, the only state-related security concern for Russia was related to the growing NATO activity in the Arctic. Official statements noted that Russia was watching NATO’s activity with concern.<sup>126</sup> On the other hand, Russian Foreign

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<sup>123</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 23.

<sup>124</sup> Klimenko, *Russia’s Arctic Security Policy*, 12.

<sup>125</sup> Norwegian Intelligence Service, *Annual Assessment by The Norwegian Intelligence Service*, 23.

<sup>126</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 15.



Minister Lavrov also publicly remarked that “a militarization of the Arctic should be avoided, and that Russia did not see what benefit NATO could bring to the Arctic.”<sup>127</sup>

A marked change came in 2007 when Arthur Chilingarov, a polar researcher and member of the Russian Parliament planted the Russian flag on the seabed under the North Pole and declared that, “the Arctic is ours!”<sup>128</sup> The most serious deterioration of the relationship between Russia and the West started in 2012, when Putin returned as Russian President. Differences with the West have gradually spilled over into the Arctic and reached a high when Russia became militarily involved in Ukraine in 2014.<sup>129</sup> Over the last few years, Russian politicians and the Russian military frequently allege that political and military pressure from the US and NATO have increased to include arguments that the US and some NATO countries, especially Norway, want to undermine Russia’s position and reduce its presence in the Arctic. Official statements note that Russia is still facing NATO just across the border and that NATO’s military exercises in immediate proximity have been a part of the Russian rationale and rhetoric to their stand on modernization of the Russian military. “Russia claims that it has modernized forces in the Arctic since other Arctic coastal states have already conducted the same modernization programs of their armed forces in the region.”<sup>130</sup> It is also apparent that Russian strategists are concerned with future US and NATO plans in the Arctic. If the Arctic

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Klimenko, *Russia’s Arctic Security Policy*, 6.

<sup>129</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 15.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.



becomes ice-free in the future, Russian military experts state “the U.S. could permanently deploy nuclear submarines and sea-based ABM systems in the Arctic Ocean capable of intercepting Russian ballistic missiles and launching potential preventive strikes against Russia.”<sup>131</sup>

For the first time, the 2014 Russian Military Doctrine, included the task of protecting Russian interests in the Arctic, and stated “the primary military danger to Russia is the expansion of NATO’s power by positioning military infrastructure closer to Russian borders.”<sup>132</sup> In 2014, Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu implied that the primary reason for the deteriorated relationship between Russia and its Arctic neighbors stems mainly from events outside the region.<sup>133</sup> In Russia, there is a growing concern about increased NATO activity and presence in the Arctic. This, combined with increased anti-Western sentiment, could deepen Russia’s distrust of the West and prompt Russia to view the Arctic as a security policy challenge.<sup>134</sup> A part of Russia’s growing concern with NATO expansion eastwards stems from the Russian military intervention in Ukraine. Conflict elsewhere has the potential to spread to the High North, and the Ukraine crisis illustrates this connection.<sup>135</sup> Norway and the other Scandinavian countries have backed

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<sup>131</sup> Heininen, Sergunin, and Yarovoy, 15.

<sup>132</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 16.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>134</sup> Norwegian Intelligence Service, *Annual Assessment by The Norwegian Intelligence Service*, 22.

<sup>135</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 20.



the West's sanctions policy against Russia, which has responded with countermeasures such as stopping the import of Norwegian fish, stopping diplomatic cooperation, and increasing public criticism. The situation has also affected co-operation in the North.

The Arctic is highly important for the Russian Armed Forces, and in particular, the Navy, as the Northern Fleet is headquartered on the Kola Peninsula and operates many of Russia's strategic submarines. It is stated that "Up to 81.5 percent of Russia's sea-based strategic nuclear weapons are now located in the Russian Arctic."<sup>136</sup> The primary geostrategic value of the High North is the Russian nuclear submarines and the need to protect them.

The submarine patrols are concentrated in the areas of the Barents Sea, which the Russians designate as the bastion.<sup>137</sup> One of the Russian high-priority tasks is to protect their bases and patrol areas against hostile forces. In the event of conflict, Russia will seek to establish control in the region, and at the same time deny others access to it (see figure 6).

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<sup>136</sup> Klimenko, *Russia's Arctic Security*, 19.

<sup>137</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 20.





Figure 5. Schematic Diagram: The Russian Bastion and the reach of the Bastion Defense

Source: Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy-Unified Effort* (Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Defence, 2015), 21, accessed February 16, 2017, <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/fd/dokumenter/unified-effort>.

While Russia publically has stated that a militarization of the region should be avoided, they have made significant efforts to re-establish and rebuild their own military power in the Arctic through the Russian State Armament Program (GVP-2020).<sup>138</sup>

The 2013 Arctic Strategy lists several main tasks for Russian military forces including “the creation of favorable operating conditions in the Arctic zone and increasing the combat readiness level of all armed forces in accordance with military

<sup>138</sup> Klimenko, *Russia’s Arctic Security Policy*, 18-19.



threats and dangers.” Another task listed in the strategy document is, “to prevent non-military pressure and aggression against Russia, ensuring sovereign rights of its Arctic zone, providing strategic deterrence and repelling aggression in the event of armed conflict.” Lastly it addresses “the development of infrastructure for stationing forces in Russia’s Arctic Zone and enhancing their ability to perform tasks in the Arctic.”<sup>139</sup>

As part of the Russian desire to retain control in the Arctic, they have increased construction of military infrastructure in the region. The Northern Fleet has been conducting reconnaissance missions and dispatching equipment transports along the Northern Sea Route to re-establish a permanent presence on the islands and archipelagoes along the route. This presence includes military infrastructure such as bases, early warning systems, missile defenses, as well as air bases, airstrips, air-surveillance for military as well as civilian reasons.<sup>140</sup> The Northern Fleet’s main tasks include the “maintaining of a naval strategic nuclear force with constant readiness for nuclear deterrence; protection of the Russian exclusive economic zone and areas of productive activities.” Other task the NF is responsible for is “suppressing illegal activities; ensuring safety of navigation; and implementing foreign policy actions of the Russian Government in economically important areas of the oceans.”<sup>141</sup> The GVP-2020 has modernized the Northern Fleet substantially to include upgrading the in-place submarines and surface vessels, as well as replacing old submarines and ships with new ones, as they play a key

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<sup>139</sup> Klimenko, *Russia’s Arctic Security*, 19.

<sup>140</sup> Norwegian Intelligence Service, *Annual Assessment by The Norwegian Intelligence Service*, 24.

<sup>141</sup> Klimenko, *Russia’s Arctic Security Policy*, 19.



role in Russia's nuclear deterrence policy.<sup>142</sup> In addition to the modernization of surface vessels, the Northern Fleet has have taken delivery of several new combat and support vessels since 2010 and is projected to continue receiving additional new vessels until the end of 2020.<sup>143</sup>

The Kola land forces are assessed to be primarily defensive in nature, and their primary mission is to defend Russian territory, particularly the missile-armed submarines in the area.<sup>144</sup> Russian air and air defense capabilities have also been improved in the region, and significant measures have enhanced protection against air strikes and long-range cruise missiles. Another area of importance has been to establish a sophisticated early- warning chain and add longer-range air defense to the arsenal such as S-400 missile system.<sup>145</sup>

On 1 December 2014, Russia stood up its new Joint Strategic Command North. "JSCN has command authority across Arctic Russia and is believed capable of improving Russia's ability to coordinate and conduct operations in the High North."<sup>146</sup> Russia also established a new dedicated Arctic brigade in 2015, in addition to the ones already in

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<sup>142</sup> Norwegian Intelligence Service, *Annual Assessment by The Norwegian Intelligence Service*, 24.

<sup>143</sup> Klimenko, *Russia's Arctic Security Policy*, 20.

<sup>144</sup> Norwegian Intelligence Service, *Annual Assessment by The Norwegian Intelligence Service*, 24.

<sup>145</sup> RT International, "Russia Deploys S-400 Missile Defense Systems in Arctic," accessed March 20, 2017, <https://www.rt.com/news/325094-s-400-arctic-deployment/>.

<sup>146</sup> Norwegian Intelligence Service, *Annual Assessment by The Norwegian Intelligence Service*, 24.



place. The 80th Independent Motorized Infantry Brigade was established in Alakurtti, 60 km from the Finnish border and was declared operational in January 2015.<sup>147</sup> The buildup and restoration of bases, airstrips, and infrastructure on the Russian archipelagoes along the Northern Sea Route along with modern air defense systems are a natural extension of the overall modernization strategy to protect Russia and its interests in the region.<sup>148</sup>

Figure 6 illustrates the heightened Russian focus in the Arctic.



Figure 6. Russian Military Bases and Installations of the Arctic

Source: Jeremy Bender, "Russia Just Put the Finishing Touches on 6 Arctic Military Bases," Business Insider, December 7, 2015, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/russia-equipped-six-military-bases-in-the-arctic-2015-12>.

<sup>147</sup> Klimenko, *Russia's Arctic Security Policy*, 22.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.



Russia is also bolstering its border guard in the Arctic zone to protect certain areas, population centers, and critical facilities from natural and man-made threats. The Coast Guard is being modernized, and its capabilities to operate in the Arctic have increased. This modernization includes building infrastructure along the Northern Sea Route and establishing Coast Guard stations and search and rescue centers on the islands and archipelagoes of New Siberia and Franz Josef Land. The intention is that these can respond to potential situations as the projected increased civil and economic activities increase with a more accessible Arctic. Russia has no equal when it comes to ice-breaking ships, thanks to its well-equipped fleet of nuclear powered breakers. Russia is building new icebreakers and plans to commission several new icebreakers over the next few years to support increased shipping and operations in the High North.<sup>149</sup>

All eight Arctic countries have increased their activity in the High North. However, Russia is likely to remain the dominant actor in the Arctic, due to the country's vast Arctic coastline, large amounts of natural resources in the North, and the region's military importance.<sup>150</sup> Even though Russia has pursued a policy of heightened focus on the Arctic since 2008, they do not pursue this policy only to counter militarily security challenges in the region. There are economic, social and environmental aspects related to this issue, as interest in the Arctic continues to increase in the geopolitical arena, and ever more states fix their eyes on the region.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>150</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 23.

<sup>151</sup> Klimenko, *Russia's Arctic Security Policy*, 13.



## Summary and Findings

The High North and the Russian Arctic zone are of great military strategic importance for Russia. The Kola Peninsula and the greater Murmansk region, home to the Northern Fleet and the JSCN, hold both a historic as well as a contemporary value. Most of Russia's sea-based nuclear deterrence and second-strike capability are based here, and it is vital for Russia to protect it. NATO's presence, activity, and expansion seems to be the highest perceived threat against Russia, and a major reason for the emphasis they have on the region today.

For Russia, the region also holds great importance for other reasons. The economic prospects related to natural resources located there are a contributing factor. Russia has competing claims to the sea bed with Denmark at this time, and they will probably continue to produce research data to support their claims to the United Nations that the Arctic belongs to Russia. The Northern Sea Route will not compete successively with the Panama and Suez canals. According to most sources reviewed, the opening of the North-West Passage does not seem to be viable for the near future. Still, Russia is investing heavily in the Northern Sea Route and this interest is likely to continue, which seems to fit with their struggle to obtain sovereignty over the Arctic.

The High North and the Arctic zone seems to have played a role and partially can explain the Russian Snap exercise. However, it is evident that this region alone does not fully explain the reasons for the snap exercise. To fully explore the reasons for the Russian snap exercise, it is necessary to examine the third explanation, the relationship between Russia and NATO, and how it has changed in the last decade.



## Russia and NATO

The Russian suspension of the “Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe” in 2007 was the first warning sign that peace and stability in Europe were deteriorating.<sup>152</sup> Some might argue that this deterioration actually started with the US abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002.<sup>153</sup> The reason for Russia’s intervention in Georgia in 2008 was to prevent Georgia’s eventual NATO membership.<sup>154</sup> For years, the former Soviet republics, especially Ukraine, have been a top priority in Russian foreign policy.

Van Herpen considers the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) strategically crucial to Russia’s security and an area where it has special interests.<sup>155</sup> A western view would suggest that President Putin was forced to act against Ukraine due to Ukraine was developing closer ties with the West instead of aligning with Russia and the Eurasian Union. A Russian view would suggest that the reason for using military power against Ukraine was that the US and NATO-backed opposition overthrew the democratically-elected President Yanukovich and replaced him with a friend of the US. Russia faced immediate danger of Ukraine abrogating the renewal of the treaty basing the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea, and this outcome was clearly not something Russia and

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<sup>152</sup> Van Herpen, 245.

<sup>153</sup> Wade Boese, “U.S. Withdraws from ABM Treaty; Global Response Muted,” Arms Control Association, July/August 2002, accessed March 20, 2017, [https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2002\\_07-08/abmjul\\_aug02](https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2002_07-08/abmjul_aug02).

<sup>154</sup> Van Herpen, 233.

<sup>155</sup> Norwegian Intelligence Service, *Annual Assessment by The Norwegian Intelligence Service*, 8.



President Putin could accept. In February 2014, uniformed militias without insignia occupied parts of Crimea in a swift maneuver. Whatever the true reasons are, Russia's occupation ended with a referendum and the Russian annexation of Crimea.<sup>156</sup> The conflict in other parts of Ukraine is still ongoing. Official Russian rhetoric has long described NATO in highly unfavorable terms, which was strongly reinforced by the Ukraine conflict. Russia is concerned about further NATO expansion, in addition to the deployment of NATO military capabilities near its borders, and the plans and deployment of the US missile defense shield along NATO's eastern border.<sup>157</sup>

Russian Military Doctrine from 2014 states that “the primary military danger to Russia is the expansion of NATO's power closer to Russian borders.”<sup>158</sup> Russia has also reacted strongly to the economic sanctions that the West, to include NATO and the European Union, introduced in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis.<sup>159</sup> According to Fenton, “the pattern of tensions between Russia and NATO from 2010 and 2015 bears hallmarks of a security dilemma.”<sup>160</sup> From a Russian view, this dilemma is related to further attempts of NATO expansion, the establishment of a missile defense shield, and after the

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<sup>156</sup> Van Herpen, 243.

<sup>157</sup> Norwegian Intelligence Service, *Annual Assessment by The Norwegian Intelligence Service*, 9.

<sup>158</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 16.

<sup>159</sup> Norwegian Intelligence Service, *Annual Assessment by The Norwegian Intelligence Service*, 9.

<sup>160</sup> Toby Fenton, “The NATO - Russia Security Dilemma,” *Future Foreign Policy*, September 6, 2015, accessed February 19, 2017, <http://www.futureforeignpolicy.com/nato-russia-security-dilemma/>, 5.



Ukrainian crisis, a more assertive NATO that is deploying troops and hardware, and exercising more aggressively and frequently across NATO territory.

Russian perception of this NATO expansion does not identify the actions taken by NATO as defensive in behavior. On the contrary, it is perceived as quite the opposite.<sup>161</sup> NATO's decision to establish a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force in 2014 and "to adapt and respond to emerging security challenges posed by Russia's aggressive foreign policy toward Ukraine and the Baltic States presents further difficulties."<sup>162</sup> Russia sees this as an extension of NATO's assertiveness and aggression towards Russian security. The NATO decision to deploy the Baltic Brigade, consisting of battalion-sized battlegroups to Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland, further cemented this Russian perception of a more aggressive alliance, which further prompts reactions from Russian authorities.<sup>163</sup> Russia's response to NATO's actions has included deployment of more troops on the borders of the Baltic States, increased exercise activity, and enhanced their own deterrence capability on their western border. This is especially evident in Kaliningrad, Russia's exclave sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania and home to the Russian Baltic Fleet. Here, Russia has strengthened its Anti-Access/Area Denial capabilities over the last years with upgraded strategic early-warning radars, coastal

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<sup>161</sup> Fenton, 4.

<sup>162</sup> SHAPE, "Fact Sheet," accessed February 19, 2017, <https://www.shape.nato.int/page349011837>.

<sup>163</sup> Jan Joel Andersson and Erika Balsyte, "Winter is Coming—Chilly Winds across Northern Europe," Institute for Security Studies, December 2016, accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/detail/article/winter-is-coming-chilly-winds-across-northern-europe/>, 3.



defense missiles, cruise missiles, and anti-aircraft missiles. Implied in the measures taken is that “Russia has created anti-access/area denial zones that are well defended and which cover many European and NATO member states.”<sup>164</sup>

The relationship between Russia and NATO is undergoing its deepest crisis since the end of the Cold War.<sup>165</sup> Communication and cooperation have essentially ceased since Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. NATO stopped civilian and military cooperation in the NATO-Russia Council. The West imposed a strict sanctions regime against Russia, and both Russia and NATO have taken military measures along the borders between the two.<sup>166</sup> On both sides, these measures included deployment of forces, hardware, and extensive military exercises as show of force and deterrence.

Russia perceives NATO as aggressive, expansionist, and seeking to adopt new member states. NATO has a similar perception of Russia, which they see as “aggressive, in pursuit of national interests and willing to use military force to achieve them.”<sup>167</sup>

### Summary and Findings

The relationship between NATO and Russia is evidently at the lowest point since the end of the Cold War. The snap exercise was initiated against the backdrop of a

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<sup>164</sup> Andersson and Balsyte, 2-3.

<sup>165</sup> Margarete Klein and Claudia Major, “Perspectives for NATO-Russia Relations,” Stratfor, November 2015, accessed February 20, 2017, <https://www.stratfor.com/the-hub/perspectives-nato-russia-relations>.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.



Norwegian ongoing exercise and may have served a broader Russian purpose. Norway is NATO in the North, and it seems here was a message and a signal therein. The posture and the combat simulations as the Russian exercise unfolded in the High North, seems to indicate that it was about defending Russia's Arctic borders, protecting its interests and fighting a hostile enemy in the region. The sheer size and scope of the Russian response appears to indicate that the threat Russia simulated to fight had to be larger than what the combined Norwegian armed forces can muster, and this outcome is supported through Russian statements that they regard NATO as an aggressor with increasing interests in the Arctic.

However, the fact that the exercise spread beyond the snap exercise centered on the Northern Fleet and Joint Strategic Command North appears to indicate that there was more to this exercise than messaging and signaling against NATO in the North. As the exercise spread through the Baltics and to the Black Sea and beyond, it seems to have been a very strong and clear message to NATO. Russia's 2014 military doctrine states that NATO's power projection close to Russia's border constitutes the primary military threat to Russia.<sup>168</sup> Russia apparently demonstrated that in a short time frame, they can mobilize the entire nation's military apparatus and conduct complex joint and interagency military operations across the length of its borders. As previously mentioned, official Russian statements stated that they initiated the exercise in view of NATO intelligence capabilities in the north and that the spread of the exercise along the frontier between

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<sup>168</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 16.



Russia and NATO all the way to the Black Sea was a response to the deployment of US and other NATO forces to the Baltics, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria.<sup>169</sup>

The exercise also demonstrates the willingness to counter NATO activity with military means and that they can mobilize and outnumber NATO's capabilities in the short term. However, there might be other explanations to why this Russian exercise was conducted. The next, and last explanation that will be examined is the reform and modernization process of the Russian Military, to include military exercises in general.

#### The Reform and Modernization of the Russian Military

The use of military power is not a singular event in Russian foreign policy since the fall of the Soviet Union. Marcel H. Van Herpen argues in *Putin's Wars—The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism* that what the world has witnessed with regards to Russia's military involvement in Chechnya in 1994 and 1999, in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine starting in 2014 is a part of Russia's assertiveness, and President Putin's grand scheme of rebuilding Russia as a great power.<sup>170</sup> However, it seems that the Russian intervention in Ukraine took the outside world by surprise and again confirmed that one of the greatest challenges to the West is the ability, and perhaps the will, to understand Russian politics, and when and why they resort to using military power as a political tool.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Nikolsky.

<sup>170</sup> Van Herpen, 266.

<sup>171</sup> Heier and Kjølberg, 13.



Since mid-2007, Russia has conducted an expansive foreign policy to regain its former international position, and the modernization of the armed forces has been a central part of their reconstitution. The recent Russian military modernization process began in the wake of the war in Georgia in 2008, and then-Minister of Defense Anatoliy Serdyukov recommitted the military to a “lengthy overhaul involving massive personnel cuts, rearmament, and reorganization into a professional force capable of responding quickly to acute crises.”<sup>172</sup> In 2010, these plans were enshrined in the State Armaments Program 2011-2020, or GVP-2020, despite President Putin’s statements on several occasions that “Russia would not be drawn into an arms race.”<sup>173</sup> Through its armaments program for 2011–2020, Russia plans a ten-fold increase in weapons procurement in comparison to the preceding ten-year period. The aim was to increase the proportion of modern military armaments in the forces from 20 percent in 2011 to 70 percent by 2020.<sup>174</sup> In 2013, for the first time since 2003, Russia spent a larger proportion of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defense than the United States. “The 2013 budget item ‘National Defense’ equaled 3.1 percent of GDP, increasing to 3.4 percent of GDP in

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<sup>172</sup> Jonathan Masters, “How Powerful Is Russia's Military?,” Defense One, November 14, 2014, accessed February 18, 2017, <http://www.defenseone.com/threats/2014/11/how-powerful-russias-military/99062/>.

<sup>173</sup> Cameron Johnston and Nicu Popescu, “Russia’s Military: The Weak Links,” Institute for Security Studies, February 2015, accessed March 14, 2017, [http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert\\_12\\_Russia\\_military\\_spending.pdf](http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert_12_Russia_military_spending.pdf).

<sup>174</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 19.



2014. In 2015, Russia planned a further increase in spending.”<sup>175</sup> However, the reality was that Russia’s defense spending in 2015 reached the highest seen in over 20 years. The equivalent of more than 5 percent of GDP was spent on military-related budget items. Despite this increase, the military budget ended up more modest than originally planned. The cut was largely attributed to the challenging economic situation in Russia.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Norwegian Intelligence Service, *Annual Assessment by The Norwegian Intelligence Service*, 15.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.





Figure 7. Russian Annual Percentage Growth in GDP and the Defense Budget

Source: Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy-Unified Effort* (Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Defence, 2015), 19, accessed February 16, 2017, <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/fd/dokumenter/unified-effort>.

NOTE: Russian annual percentage growth in GDP and the defense budget (bars measured against the left-hand column) and the defense budget proportion of GDP (line graph measured against the right-hand column).

The military reform has produced a much slimmer and more flexible military organization with a shorter response time and an improved command and control structure. Enhanced long-range aviation, nuclear forces, airborne forces, air forces, and navy continue to take priority in the modernization plans.<sup>177</sup> That nuclear weapons still

<sup>177</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 19.



are a high priority seems to be an expression of Russia's renewed great power ambitions. These weapons might also be used to compensate for Russia's inferiority in conventional forces in relation to the West's overall combat power. Additionally, Russia places a high value on the development of high-precision cruise and ballistic missiles that can reach all parts of Europe from Russian territory and Russian vessels.<sup>178</sup> Russia's military quality is not lagging behind most NATO countries, and the Armed Forces, in general, have increased and improved over the last years in areas of readiness, sustainability, strategic mobility, and joint inter-agency cooperation.<sup>179</sup> The ability to conduct "strategic reinforcements by rail, sea and air, has boosted Russia's power projection capability and speed."<sup>180</sup> The Russian military is very capable of transporting larger units with or without their heavy equipment and often across vast distances of Russian territory. The extensive number of military exercises conducted from 2010 to 2015 demonstrates that the Russian reforms have produced results. The combination of increased military budgets, focus on establishing and re-building capabilities in conjunction with an emphasis on "training and conducting large formation operations in all-arms and joint inter-service has increased Russia's military capacity."<sup>181</sup>

The gloomy economic situation that Russia faced after the dramatic fall in oil prices from 2014, Western sanctions, and lower oil production created considerable

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>179</sup> Heier and Kjølberg, 13.

<sup>180</sup> Norwegian Intelligence Service, *Annual Assessment by The Norwegian Intelligence Service*, 15.

<sup>181</sup> Norberg, 63-65.



challenges for the country and was expected to have an impact on the defense sector. However, to date, there are no substantial grounds to suggest that the Armed Forces will be hit and it is worth noting this statement: “Russian authorities have previously maintained a high level of military spending during economic downturns, and most recently during the 2009 recession.”<sup>182</sup> The Russian military apparatus and Russian power have proven more capable over the past few years than at any time then since the reforms were initiated in 2008. The armed forces today are more flexible, adaptable, and scalable for achieving Russia’s foreign policy aims.<sup>183</sup> The development of Russian military power follows two main trends. Firstly, Russia’s modernization process from 2008 to 2015 has increased the nation’s military abilities. Secondly, Russia has clearly demonstrated its willingness to utilize all instruments of national power including military power to promote national interests. However, worth noting is that Russia may have turned the economic corner as 2016 statistics show that Russian exports of agricultural products increased markedly and that Russian economic performance in 2016 offset Western sanctions.<sup>184</sup>

### Russian Military Exercises

Russian military exercises from 2010 to 2015 have demonstrated that its military has gone through effective modernization reforms. There has been a markedly upward

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<sup>182</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy*, 18.

<sup>183</sup> Masters.

<sup>184</sup> Dr. Lester W. Grau, provided to the author in conversation, March 31, 2017.



shift regarding the objectives, scope, and complexity in exercise scenarios in this period.<sup>185</sup> Russian exercises are of two types. Annual strategic exercises and parallel exercises, and surprise inspections.<sup>186</sup>

Russian forces conduct thousands of exercises each year, at all levels, but the cycle usually culminates with a strategic fall exercise in September. Russian military and political leadership have put huge emphasis and efforts in the annual strategic exercise over the last years. This annual exercise is well planned and it alternates between the military districts, and are generally focused in one strategic direction; West, Center, East, or South. Another feature regarding these annual exercises is that the Military District that is exercised normally is reinforced by the other MD(s).<sup>187</sup> They train all-arms operations within service branches, as well as joint inter-service and inter-agency operations. Norberg states that “these exercises are all about waging large-scale interstate war, often to include escalation to using nuclear weapons.”<sup>188</sup> From mid-2013 onwards, these exercises have increased significantly in size and Norberg concludes that, “while fielding somewhere around 15,000 and 19,000 servicemen in 2011-2013, they grew up to 155,000 servicemen in 2014. Equipment numbers also rose from around 1,000 pieces to 8,000 in

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<sup>185</sup> Øyvind Ravndal, *Øket Russisk Operativ Evne* [Increased Russian Operational Ability] (Thesis, Forsvarets Høyskole, Forsvarets Høgskole, Oslo, 2016), 51.

<sup>186</sup> Norberg, 23-24.

<sup>187</sup> Ravndal, 40.

<sup>188</sup> Norberg, 23.



the same timeframe.”<sup>189</sup> Together, the above-mentioned factors seem to confirm the Russian military exercises has grown in size and complexity from 2010 to 2015.

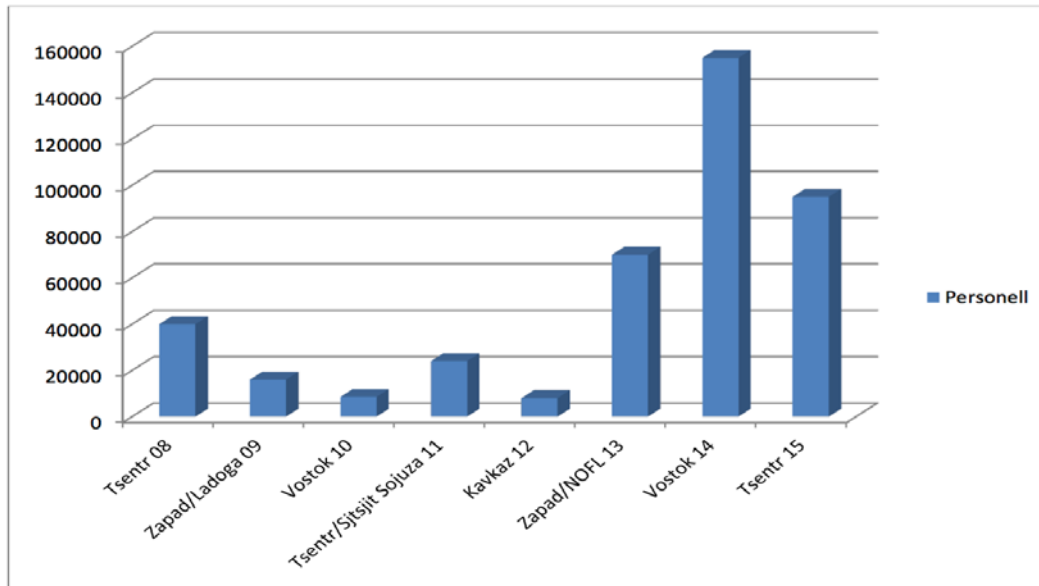


Figure 8. Russian Strategic Exercises 2008-2015, Scope Visualized by Number of Participating Servicemen

Source: Øyvind Ravndal, *Øket Russisk Operativ Evne* [Increased Russian Operational Ability] (Thesis, Forsvarets Høyskole, Oslo, 2016), 41.

According to Norberg, “Russia re-introduced surprise inspections in 2013 as a part of their normal exercise pattern.”<sup>190</sup> The number of surprise inspections increased after mid-2013, and they are either conducted on a territorial basis, such as in a MD, or on a functional basis, in an arm or branch of service. Norberg further states that “the reasons for these surprise inspections is to assess the results of military reform, to test

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 56-57.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 21.



readiness levels, the command and control structures, and the Russian forces' ability to switch from peacetime activities to war.”<sup>191</sup> For some units these surprise inspections were cancelled as soon as they were ready to deploy, while others deployed to the field and their area of operation.<sup>192</sup> The exercises are comprehensive, and regardless of the size and number of units and personnel participating, they have followed more or less the same pattern. Units have been alerted, inspected in terms of combat readiness, redeployed, and then conducted a combat mission, often involving a live fire exercise.<sup>193</sup> However, there seems to be a further shift in the pattern since 2014, where these “snap” exercises started out with limitations to the number and size of participating units. These exercises have increased in size and scope since they were reintroduced. The evidence seems to indicate that the annual Russian strategic military exercise is initiated with a snap exercise. This was observed with exercise VOSTOK 2014, TSENTR 2015, and again with the exercise subject for this study.<sup>194</sup>

In 2013, the Russian military apparatus conducted 12 surprise inspections. There were probably numerous more conducted, but these fell below the criteria for Nordberg's study.<sup>195</sup> The number of snap exercises rose to 18 in 2014. They were initiated with anti-submarine operations in the Northern Fleet, following the same pattern as they ended in

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<sup>191</sup> Norwegian Intelligence Service, *Annual Assessment by The Norwegian Intelligence Service*, 15.

<sup>192</sup> Norberg, 24.

<sup>193</sup> Elfving.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Norberg, 38.



2013.<sup>196</sup> (See figure 7 for a visual depiction of selected snap exercises conducted in 2013 and 2104, bold text in the table indicates major surprise inspections.) The same trends for the strategic exercises are notable. The size and complexity of surprise inspections increased throughout 2013 and 2014. The largest snap military exercise in 2013 involved approximately 160,000 troops and around 5,000 pieces of equipment. Three snap exercises in 2014 were distinct regarding size. In the Western MD one involved roughly 150,000 troops and around 1,200 pieces of hardware. Another in the Central MD, with 65,000 troops and 5,500 pieces of equipment, and the last one in the Eastern MD with 155,000 troops.<sup>197</sup> So far, there is no complete overview on the number of snap exercises conducted in 2015, but President Putin has stated that surprise inspections will continue.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 58-59.

<sup>198</sup> Ravndal, 50.



Table 1. Overview of Mass in Russian Surprise Inspections 2013-2014

Year	Surprise insp. #; Unit	Servicemen	Equipment (stated number of pieces): details
2013	1. Central MD	7,000	"a few hundred", 40 aircraft/helicopters
	2. Southern MD	7,000	250 armoured vehicles, 50 arty pcs, 20 aircraft/helicopters, 20 ships
	3. Airborne Forces	500	29 armoured vehicles
	4. Air & Space Defence Forces	8,700	-
	5. Air Force	-	20 aircraft/helicopters
	6. Eastern MD	a) (initial figure) 80,000 b) (later) 160,000	a) (initial figure) 1,000 tanks/armoured vehicles, 130 aircraft/ helicopters, 70 ships b) (later figure) 5,000 tanks/armoured vehicles, 130 aircraft/ helicopters, 70 ships
	7. Strat. Miss. Forces	2,500	350 pcs
	8. Southern MD	600	110 pcs
	4. Northern Fleet	200	20 vehicles
	5. Baltic Fleet	2,000	-
2014	6. Western & Central MD	150,000	880 tanks, 1,200 pcs of equipment, 90 aircraft, 120 helicopters, 80 ships
	7. EMERCOM	13,000	2,500 vehicles
	8. Caspian Flotilla	400	10 minesweepers
	9. Caspian Flotilla	-	20 surface combat and support ships
	10. Northern Fleet	-	4 anti-submarine aircraft, 3 fighter aircraft
	11. Central MD & Airborne	65,000	5,500 pcs, 180 aircraft, 720 tanks, 950 armoured vehicles, 600 arty pcs
	12. Southern MD (CBRN)	1,200	
	14. Eastern MD	9,000	4,000 pcs
	17. Eastern MD (Navy, Air Force)	1,500	

Source: Johan Norberg, *Training to Fight–Russia’s Major Military Exercises 2011-2014* (Stockholm: FOI, 2015), 58.

Norberg concludes in his research that the effects military exercises have had on the Russian armed forces in the period from 2011 to 2014 are;

All Military Districts, all arms and every service are exposed to surprise inspections. In turn, this has improved Russian military readiness and command and control ability. Motivation for commanders to take every effort possible to ensure that their units have the necessary readiness level is probably heightened. Finally, these exercises have clearly increased Russia’s military capacity and increased its fighting power.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Norberg, 54-57.



## Summary and Findings

The military reform and modernization process together with military exercises seem to be important in attempting to explain this Russian snap exercise:

Military exercises serve an important and regular function for any state with armed forces that has potential military adversaries. Russia is no exception. To understand recent high-profile Russian military exercises, it is crucial to understand what military exercises are for. When states devote resources to equipping and training a military, it is not necessarily because they are planning to attack another state or because they fear imminent invasion. International events that would require military action are almost always events that run a very low probability of occurrence. Yet, while they are events of low-probability, their nature presupposes high-risk; during such international emergencies, the consequences of failure are great. If a military needs to be used, it had better perform well.<sup>200</sup>

Looking back at the statement that was presented in the beginning of the thesis, the author finds it very relevant to explain both the snap exercise subject to this study, as well as other exercises conducted. In the extreme a nation will have to use military force and Russia has shown willingness to use military force on several occasions over the last decade and the experiences derived from these conflicts and wars have led to substantial reform and modernization programs.

Russia's massive reform and modernization processes that have taken place over the last decade appear to have produced positive results. An important aspect of reforming, modernizing, and fielding new equipment is to test and validate that it works as intended. Russia has also developed and implemented new doctrines and strategies in conjunction with modernizing and reforming its military. These works include military doctrine, as well as an Arctic Strategy, and through extensive military exercises, they

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<sup>200</sup> Pinkoski.



have tested and validated their functions. Russia's increasing exercise operational tempo has enabled them to test, validate, and improve their emerging doctrine in a way that suggests their commitment to rapid deployment and redeployment as the conflict or situation requires.

Exercises are key to building military capability. All Russian military forces have gone through substantial modernization as parts of the State Armament Program (GVP-2020), and exercise activities has steadily increased in all domains within this period. The purpose of these exercises, besides demonstrating strength, is to train Russian land, sea and air forces' ability to scramble on short notice. The biggest challenge with the increasing trend of massive snap exercises seems to be that they follow a pattern of not complying with international notification agreements, or they involve Russia providing notification just as the Russian's initiate the exercise. This tendency is especially worrying for Russia's western neighbors, since in that stage of an exercise, it can be difficult to determine if it is a routine military exercise, or preparations for military aggression. Russia has restructured its command and control architecture, created new formations, fielded substantial new equipment, and trimmed its organization and the West has observed a significant increase in military exercises through this reform period. Figure 9, demonstrates the exercise gap between NATO, and it appears that most of Russia's military exercises exceed NATO exercises in size and scope, but they have also been much more numerous.



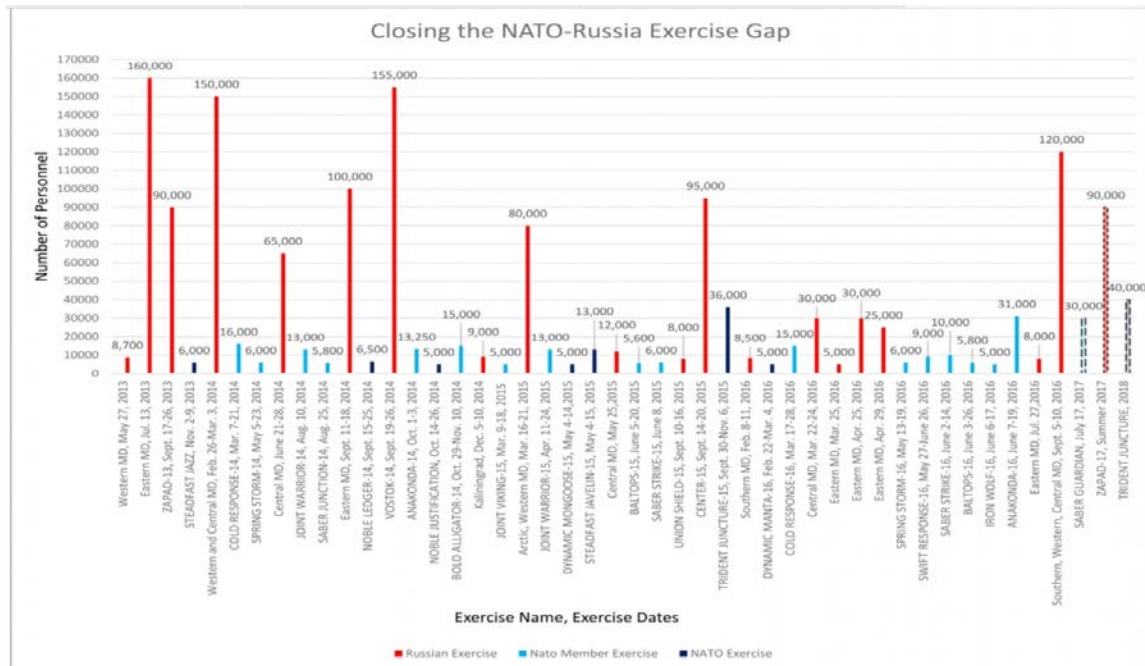


Figure 9. The NATO-Russia Exercise Gap . . . Then, Now, and 2017

Source: Ian Brzezinski and Nicholas Varangis, “The NATO-Russia Exercise Gap ... Then, Now, and 2017,” Atlantic Council, October 25, 2016, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/the-nato-russia-exercise-gap-then-now-2017>.

NOTE: Exercise Joint Viking 15 in comparison to the Russian snap exercise Arctic, Western MD.

Russian strategic mobility capabilities have arguably increased; Russia can rapidly shift forces and reinforce in every strategic direction primarily using railways, but also by using their increased strategic air transport capability.

Over the last decade, Russia seems to have used NATO’s preoccupation with out of area operations to concentrate on building military capability, and has under this cover, has been able to restructure, modernize, and reform its forces, command and control



structures and logistical capability to enable them to counter NATO in Europe, and arguably, if needed, fight and defeat them.

The increase and change in Russian exercise patterns, especially the heightened focus on snap inspections from 2013, suggest several significant implications. First it seems that the majority, if not all the exercises conducted in this period, are exercises directed to a rapid transition from peace to war. These snap inspections, including the one used as the case study for this paper, trained joint inter-service and joint inter-agency operations and involved all-arms within all service branches. The comprehensive nature of this exercise suggests that Russia has taken huge efforts to develop their ability to effectively operate in a joint and inter-agency setting.

Another important aspect related to this exercise, but not necessarily unique to the exercise, is that it started locally in the area of responsibility of the JSCN but spread nationwide including all independent services as well as the nuclear triad. Further, the exercise developed to encompass the entire Russian Federation. Furthermore, the inclusion of strategic transportation and the ability to reinforce other sectors with additional forces not organic to the command suggest that Russia has a strong interest in being able to shift forces and mass combat power in its interior rapidly.<sup>201</sup>

Rapidity in mobilization is another key point. The timeframe from when units are alerted to when they deploy to their operating areas is also evidence that Russia's response time from identification of a threat to response is very low. Improving Russia's ability to command and control these large-scale exercises has most likely been a key

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<sup>201</sup> Norberg.



objective for conducting them, as it is hard to determine in another reason that Russia has increased these exercises and inspections.

So, what have the Russian military forces prepared for by doing these exercises? The scope, complexity, and sheer size of the exercises seems to indicate that they have trained for war with other states. This despite that official statements from political and military leadership states that the exercises are defensive in nature and that neighboring countries or NATO have no reason to fear Russia as an aggressor. Russia's heightened focus on reforming and modernizing its military capabilities, combined with the observed military posture and emphasis on the strategically important High North seems to suggest that we are witnessing a Russia with a significantly more capable armed force than what was the case around 2010.<sup>202</sup>

### Conclusions

This chapter provided effective informational support to the secondary research questions. It also presented the single case study of the Russian snap exercise, and through the analysis of the four possible explanations for why Russia conducted this exercise, enabled the author to answer the secondary questions. The analysis permitted a comprehensive evaluation of the Russian snap exercise and has demonstrated that the explanation is more complex and correspondingly difficult to make through one single explanation.

It is worth noting that 2015 seemed to be the year for the JSCN's "turn" to be the focus of the large annual exercise, judging by the patterns of earlier exercises, in which

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<sup>202</sup> Norberg.



the other MDs had had their “turns.” Using evidence presented, it appears that the Russian snap exercise was an opportunity for Russia to test the combat readiness of the newly formed JSCN, to rapidly mobilize forces to defend and protect its Arctic border against hostile forces, and to reinforce the regional forces with formations from other Military Districts using strategic transportation assets as rail lines and air assets. As the exercise spread across the federation and other MD’s, they exercised the entire chain of command and including the General Staff and the Command Centre in Moscow to command the efforts. This exercise demonstrated military power and capability that targeted NATO and the US, as a show of force. This exercise was not a direct response to Norway’s exercise Joint Viking 2015. However, the exercise’s timing was probably not coincidental and served a broader Russian interest. NATO’s and the US’ ongoing deployment of troops in the Baltic Sea Region, was more likely the primary target, and Russia used the opportunity to send a strong message.

Chapter 5 will provide the final conclusions and recommendations for further development and research on this topic.

The High North and the Barents Sea are especially important areas for Russia. It is the primary exercise, transit, and operations area for the Northern Fleet surface and subsurface vessels. The Kola peninsula occupies a special position as the base area for Russia’s strategic naval forces. Kola has traditionally been and still is a center of gravity for Russia’s conventional naval forces. In addition, and for the reason of protecting them, there are also substantial air and air defense forces on the northwestern corner of the country, plus naval, infantry, and other specialized land military forces. All the Russian military forces have gone through substantial modernization as parts of the State



Armament Program (GVP-2020) and exercise activities has steadily increased in all domains within this period. The purpose of these exercises, besides demonstrating strength, is to train Russian land, sea, and air forces ability to scramble on short notice. The biggest challenge with the increasing trend of massive snap exercises seems to be that they follow a pattern of not complying with international notification agreements, or conducting notification just as the exercise is initiated. This development is especially worrying for Russia's western neighbors since in that stage of an exercise, it can be difficult to determine if it is a routine military exercise or preparations for military aggression.

The negative trend in relations between Russia and the West appears to be largely related to Russia's violation of international law in its illegal occupation and annexation of the Crimea three years ago, and the country's involvement in the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine. There seems that it is little to suggest that a speedy political solution to these conflicts are within reach, or that an imminent political rapprochement between Russia and NATO is possible. NATO military and civilian work in conjunction with Russia, which were suspended in 2014, is unlikely to be resumed soon. The same applies to Norway's bilateral military cooperation with Russia, which also was shelved the same year.

The current international situation, characterized by a generally strained relationship between Russia and NATO, seems to indicate that Russia will continue to strengthen its military presence in the High North. The High North's increasing economic importance for Russia, as the venue for shipping, fisheries, and petroleum interests also seem to indicate that Russia will strengthen its situation in the region. New and improved



military capabilities increase Russia's room for maneuver near Norway. The military force balance is in Russia's favor in the High North, but this is not new, it has been like that in the past, too. The strategic military naval forces on Kola are a national resource intended to safeguard the security of the nation as a whole. Thus, Norway, Sweden, or Finland will be potentially unable to "match" Russia's military capabilities that are present on the Russian side of the borders. From a Russian perspective, the fear of NATO has been a major force behind the large-scale military modernization that the country has carried out since 2008. NATO's ambition of a strategic partnership with Russia, which was included in the alliance's strategic concept during the Lisbon-summit in 2010, looks unrealistic in view of today's situation.

Russia's military modernization and use of military force outside its own borders have caused many of NATO's member states and partnership for peace nations, such as Sweden and Finland, to react. Assertive Russia is emphasizing and reinforcing its military presence in the Baltic Sea region and increasing exercise activity there as well. Sweden and Finland are reassessing their security situations and their relations with their southern and eastern neighbors. NATO membership seems not to be an immediate reality for either nation. For Sweden and Finland, this means that they will have to maintain and develop their own military capabilities if they choose to stay as non-NATO members, but also, that they will benefit from strengthening their bilateral and multilateral agreements, such as through NORDEFCO.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

This paper was based on the author's experience in Norway's exercise Joint Viking 2015 as a member of the Norwegian Joint Headquarters. The author remembers the attention that was given to the Russian snap exercise when it was initiated, but then and after, never have had the chance to gain a deeper understanding of it and the exercises implications.

The purpose of this research was to increase the understanding of and knowledge about this Russian snap exercise, as well as its potential implications. The study examined the Russian snap exercise in detail to discern why the Russians conducted the snap exercise. In addition, the study explored the relationships between Russia and its neighboring states, Norway, Sweden, and Finland with special regards to the two non-NATO countries. The study has considered the importance of the High North and the Arctic for Russia, as well as others, such as Norway and NATO. It described the strategic interests of Russia in the Arctic regarding internal security, international security, regional stability, protection of natural resources, and sea lines of communication. The study outlined the reasons for the Russian military presence and activity in this region. The study also investigated the relationship between Russia and NATO. It focused on the deterioration of this relationship after the Ukraine Crisis and has concluded that the actions and counteractions of positioning military hardware, conducting exercises in close vicinity of one another, and the continuing exchange of critical rhetoric most likely will ensure that this relationship will stay cold.



The study has also studied the ongoing military reform and modernization program within the Russian armed forces, and looked at military exercises as a part of this project. The Russian military seems to have improved extensively over the last decade.

### Possible Implications

It is hard to judge all possible implications based on this single case study, but it seems that Russia is using military exercises in general to test and probe NATO as an alliance. Using exercises to provoke reactions enables Russia to measure how effective other nations and NATO are in mobilizing and standing up defenses. These reactive measures will provide data for Russian intelligence to measure combat power as well. Arguably, it also tests the alliance's ability to remain united, and this cohesion may also suggest that Russia is deliberately trying to affect the solidarity and resolve within NATO.

If military exercises keep increasing on both sides, this increase may also lead to a more intense arms race than what we are witnessing today. That Russia has increased military budgets and spending has probably led to a sort of domino effect across the globe, as observed with the emphasis on higher spending on military in NATO, the US and other nations. Eventually, the implication is that it may even lead to a new Cold War.

The rapid growth of Russian military capabilities in the Arctic and across all arms and services of the Russian Armed Forces has probably contributed to the corresponding increases in military spending by other nations. Norway, Sweden, and Finland have all increased their defense budgets, and this rise seems natural in light of an assertive neighbor such as Russia.



The West has taken actions to counter Russia's ability to mobilize rapidly by increasing readiness and the forward deployment of troops and formations in several areas. Since advanced warning time of Russian mobilizations seems to have decreased significantly, NATO established the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force and has deployed forces to the Baltic nations. European nations will likely reduce their mobilization times. Norway has conducted several snap exercises where formations have been alerted and redeployed to Finnmark in the wake of the Russian snap exercise.

Military exercises can cause reciprocal responses. If Russia continues to increase the number and size of exercises, and NATO counters these, it is a possibility that NATO exercises will grow and become equal or greater in size those of Russia. This response is an escalation that can lead to unintended consequences and increase the risk of conflicts. These responses can create dangerous situations and may have several implications. First, in the operating environment of increased competition between Russia and NATO, the likelihood of misinterpretation could increase. If Russia continues to conduct unannounced snap exercises, there is risk that they may mask other events. Sudden major military actions and movement may be misinterpreted as something more threatening than an exercise and can in the worst-case, lead to direct confrontation. Another implication is that if a given country or NATO responds to these snap exercises with its own snap exercises, it could do so without providing advance notice. A cycle like that can create additional risk, because such exercises are non-transparent.

#### Unexpected Findings

An unexpected and surprising finding was the realization that this specific Russian snap exercise evidently was not a direct response to Norway's exercise Joint



Viking 2015. Initially the author had this supposition, but as the research progressed this was explanation proved to be increasingly unsatisfactory. Another unexpected finding was how much this Russian snap exercise had to do with the military reform modernization process, but equally how much sense that makes in retrospect when looking at the need to conduct exercises to test, verify, and validate that the steps taken to improve its military have produced the wanted results.

### Recommendations for Further Research

Based on what has occurred with regards to the security situation in the High North, the Baltic Sea region and in Europe from 2015 to the present day, it would be an interesting study to further research the implications of the possible extension of the US—NATO missile defense shield for the already strained relationship between Russia and the West. Norway and Denmark are currently analyzing whether or not to incorporate their Aegis-equipped frigates in the missile defense shield, and this choice is causing friction and reactions from Russia.<sup>203</sup> Public statements and warnings have been given to the two countries by the Russian embassies as well as in official statements from the Kremlin.

Looking back at the delimitation regarding the implications the Russian snap exercise caused for Sweden and Finland; the author believes that this subject still is worthy of being examined more in-depth than this study provided.

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<sup>203</sup> Missile Defense Project, “Norway Considers Joining NATO's Missile Defense Shield,” CSIS Missile Defense Project, January 13, 2017, accessed March 29, 2017, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/norway-considers-joining-natos-missile-defense-shield/>.



Another topic involves Norway's "suspension" of its self-imposed restriction against a permanent allied military presence on its soil. The US Marine Corps rotation force that is currently deployed has a trial period lasting over a year. It can be argued that a continual rotation of forces may constitute a permanent military presence and Russia views this as an aggressive military step by Norway.

Also, worth noting is that in the aftermath of Joint Viking 2015 and the Russian snap exercise, Norway has conducted several snap exercises itself. Most of these exercises have included rapid mobilization and deployment to Finnmark.<sup>204</sup> In addition, Norway hosted a NATO exercise in Finnmark in March 2017 with US and British participation, and the possible effects of this exercise are yet to be seen. This exercise spurred a Russian critique against Norway and NATO, but no military action was taken on the Russian side as was the case of Joint Viking 2015; This subject might be an interesting topic for future study.

### Closing

This study has contributed to the body of literature regarding this particular Russian military snap exercise in March of 2015, as well as providing the reader with a better understanding of Russian military exercises in general. It has also provided a contribution to understanding the strategic importance of the High North and the Arctic region for Russia, and that there are other reasons besides militarily for this. The Kola

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<sup>204</sup> Thomas Nilsen, "Norway Calls Snap Drill in North, Hours after Russia," The Independent Barents Observer, June 14, 2016, accessed September 8, 2016, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2016/06/norway-calls-snap-drill-north-hours-after-russia>.



Peninsula and the Murmansk area have always been and will continue to be of vital strategic importance for Russia. Russia is also using this region as its test base for Arctic doctrine, warfare procedures and military equipment in all domains, and this will probably continue.



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